

Teenage angst

Worried sick

Jess It's nothing, I swear. I'm just a bit low.

Donny A bit low? You've been like a bear with a sore head since the start of the year. Hey! That reminds me of a joke – a horse goes into a bar and orders a drink and the bartender says: Sure, but why the long face!

Jess Oh yeah, and that's supposed to cheer me up? Look, Donny, I don't find anything funny at the moment. You can laugh off your problems, but I don't do that.

Donny You should talk to somebody. Share your worries. I'm your boyfriend, you could try me.

Jess One thing that's depressing me is the journal. It may not be possible to publish Xpress Online this year unless we involve more people.



Jess



My friends all say I'm too serious about everything but really, I've got lots of personal problems at the moment. Donny tries to help, but he doesn't really. And now it seems there's a thief in the school.

What are the rules about bringing gadgets or cash into your school? What happens if anything disappears? Where can you report anything that's stolen? Does your school have places where you can store your things safely?

Amy Hi there, you two. You look pale, Jess. Are you feeling unwell?

Jess I'm fine. I think I just got out of bed on the wrong side this morning!

Donny Hey Amy, guess what? We've decided that we should start a problem page in XOL.

Jess When did we decide that? I'm the one who's got a problem. The last thing I want is to hear everyone else's.

Donny Yes, but I'm the one whose job it is to listen and sympathize round here. In fact, I would be a great advice columnist.

Amy In England, we call that an agony aunt – or we might say uncle in your case!

Donny Advice, sympathy, counselling, whatever, I'm your man!

Amy I'm not convinced. Most people I know would go to their friends with their problems. But listen, speaking of problems. Has anybody seen my leather wallet? I've lost it, and for once there was quite a lot of cash in it.

Jess You shouldn't bring money into school, that's asking for trouble.

Amy I don't normally, but I've ordered a new racket that I have to pay for now.

Jess You're not the only person who has lost cash or valuables recently. Cat left her mobile in her bag during choir practice and it disappeared. She still hasn't found it.

Donny Where did you last have your wallet?

Amy I had it in the pocket of my tracksuit trousers, but I've just looked in the changing room and I couldn't find it anywhere. You're always in the gym these days, Jess. Did you notice anybody strange there at lunchtime today?

Jess No, I must say, I didn't see anything suspicious. One of the cleaners was there, and I think I saw the caretaker who was fixing a broken radiator. Oh and a group of Year 11s and the badminton team.

Donny In other words, there were loads of people around. Now here's something we should get worried about – a thief in the school. That might distract you from your personal problems, Jess, whatever they are ...

Money talks

Amy Hey, Spud, any news of Mikey?

Spud Yes, I've managed to see him a couple of times. I went to see him with Darren the other day. He was rushing up and down on crutches and complaining of being bored.

Amy Well that's a good sign, I suppose.

Spud Yeah, he'll be OK. Darren took him some DVDs and a load of new games. It was really generous of him. He must be rich. I could hardly afford to pay my mobile phone bill last month.

Amy Tell me about it! I was on a contract, which I couldn't afford, so now I'm on a pay-as-you-go deal. And I suppose you heard about the theft yesterday?

Spud Oh, was it your money that disappeared from the classroom?

Amy No, I was here in the gym when I lost mine. My mother went mad when I told her what happened to the £30 she gave me.

Spud Somebody stole even more than that from the teacher's drawer last week. And then there was an MP3 player that was worth over £80 ... oh, hi Darren.

Darren Hello, how's it going, Spud? Have you found your wallet yet, Amy?

Amy No, I've come to search in the lockers again. I may find it if I look more carefully.

Spud So where have you looked so far? We can help you if you like. Nobody's going to kill us for being in the girls' changing room for five minutes.

Amy Oh, thanks ... well I looked under all the benches as soon as I realized it was missing. There's that big lost property box, which is full of socks and old trainers. I turned it upside down yesterday but no luck.

Darren What did it look like?

Amy Nothing special, soft black leather. It had my bus pass in it, and my phone card and the cash.

Spud Did you report it to the office?

Amy Of course I did. And I put a notice up on the board.

Darren Have you checked behind the central heating pipes? Because things can easily ...

Amy No, but ...

Darren ... fall down ... hey, here it is! One small black wallet!

Spud Don't touch it – it might have fingerprints on it!

Darren You've watched too many detective series on TV, Spud. Hang on, I think I can reach it. It's a bit dusty but ... is this it?

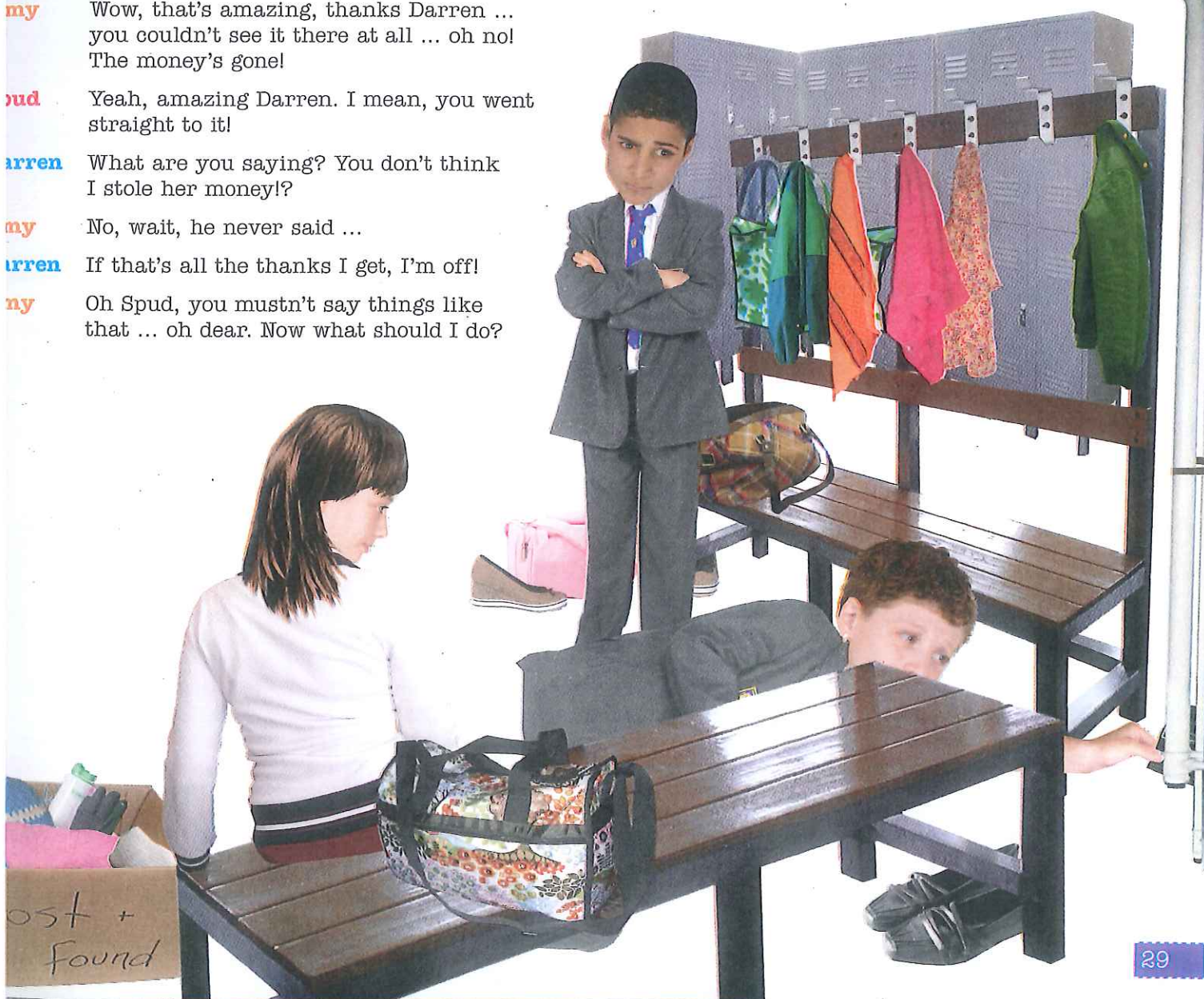
Spud



More and more things are missing from school, money and valuables. Now I don't want to be nasty, but when somebody starts throwing his money around, you can't help getting a bit suspicious, can you?

How much money do most Dutch kids have to spend? How do you get money? Who pays for your mobile? What does it cost for you to have a phone?

- my** Wow, that's amazing, thanks Darren ... you couldn't see it there at all ... oh no! The money's gone!
- oud** Yeah, amazing Darren. I mean, you went straight to it!
- arren** What are you saying? You don't think I stole her money!
- my** No, wait, he never said ...
- arren** If that's all the thanks I get, I'm off!
- ny** Oh Spud, you mustn't say things like that ... oh dear. Now what should I do?



A problem shared

X-citing news!

**XOL HAS JUST LAUNCHED
A NEW PROBLEM PAGE**



Your agony uncle will answer all your problem letters! He is a teenager, like you, so he understands the things that bother you. He's a guy whose advice will cheer you up!

Please help me. My girlfriend only wants me for my scooter. We were getting on fine as long as I had transport and could take her everywhere. Then last month I had a crash and the bike's off the road until I can afford to fix it. Suddenly she doesn't want to go out with me any more. What should I do? - *Biker*

If you're who I think you are, you'll need a Ferrari to get yourself a girlfriend! Seriously though, you must get rid of that one. And I don't mean the scooter!



I am a 15-year-old pupil who has just started her exam year. I feel I'm under a huge amount of pressure to do well. Also, my parents complain that I am constantly in a bad mood with them. My mum in particular often says that I must study harder, or I'll end up wiping tables in McDonald's or at the checkout in Tesco's. I have tried to tell them that I'm stressed, but my mum's exact words were: 'If you think you're stressed, you don't know the meaning of the word.' - *Not a happy camper*

I totally understand. I think I would phone a friend and have a long rant about your parents. It might not change anything but it will get it off your chest and it might make you feel better.

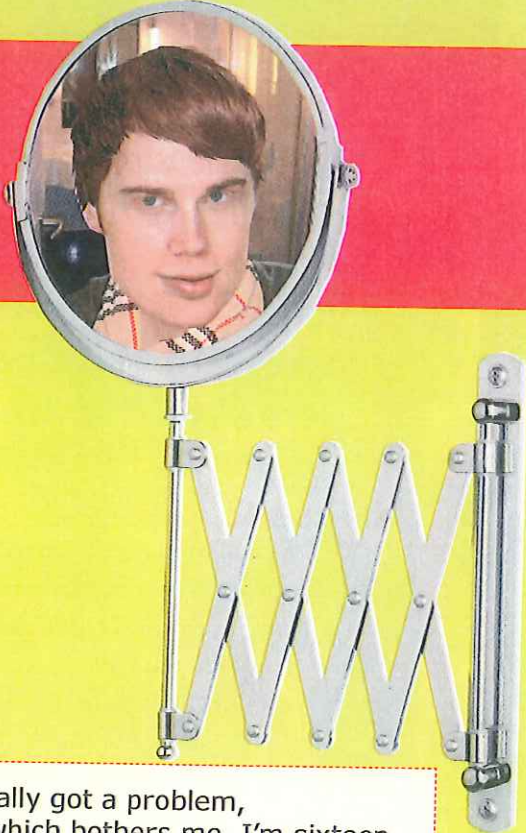
Kids our age always have a whole bunch of stuff to worry about. It's often about money, it might be about school work, parents or friends. They say a problem shared is a problem halved.

Who do you turn to when you've got a problem? What kinds of magazines or websites have agony columns in your country? Would you ever write to one – why or why not?



I've got a friend – I'll call him X – whose behaviour is worrying me. I don't want to be disloyal but there is a thief at our school and I think it could be him. His dad used to work in a factory, which has closed down, so now the family's quite poor. But X is rolling in money and I don't know where he's getting it. I don't want to accuse him. I can't believe he's really doing this. Should I tell somebody? Or shouldn't I? – *Anon*

Tricky. You need proof, but you really mustn't keep this to yourself. If you're sure, you should talk to X. Can you persuade him to give the things he stole back to their owners? And promise never to do it again? He may be embarrassed but in the end he'll be grateful. You hope.



Hi there! I haven't actually got a problem, but there's something which bothers me. I'm sixteen and I know I'm gay. At the moment, I'm not in a relationship but that's fine – plenty of time for that, I reckon! But it really depresses me when other kids use the term 'gay' as an insult, when they really mean stupid or uncool. Don't they know anything? – *Jude*

Short answer, no they don't. But you mustn't let them bother you. Hey, I'm a black guy who has had his share of insults too. Gay's OK, I say!

Hey Big Spender

- 1 If you left home tomorrow, would you be broke in a week? Would you have to go back home, hiding from your creditors, up to your eyeballs in credit card debt? It might be a scary idea, but in theory you will be out on your own shortly. Do you have the money skills
- 5 necessary to survive? Are you a shopaholic or a savvy spender? Here's some advice from dear old Mom and Dad ...

No cash?

- It's easy to overspend or not realize that this is really money you're using when it's all done with
- 10 plastic. Debit cards and credit cards are convenient; ATM cards mean you never actually visit the bank. If you're one of those people who uses a debit or credit card for every purchase, try doing without it for 30 days. For 30 days, you have to have the cash
- 15 in your pocket. See what happens!

Do you 'need' things?

- Like it or not, we're your parents, and we have a nasty habit of saying: 'You only need sunshine, oxygen, food, shelter and basic clothing.' But we
- 20 may be right. No one on the face of the earth has

ever needed a video game, a new MP3 player, a newer phone, jewelry, the coolest shoes in the store, etc. You get the picture. Break the habit. 'I want' and 'I need' are completely different things.

25 Is shopping a hobby?

- Shopping is not the best way to spend an entire weekend. The temptation to keep up with your friends is great but it just might wipe you out. When most of your social activities involve spending
- 30 money, this is definitely a sign of future money problems. Cut the mall time down. Or even better, maybe you should get a job at the mall. That way, it's the last place you'll want to be in your spare time.

36 **Do you always go over your minutes?**

Those commercials for cell phones where the parents are having chest pains over the cell phone bill are funny because a lot of us can relate to that.

- 40 As parents, we want to give you something to be responsible for. Unfortunately, sometimes you screw up. Once or twice is a mistake. But do you always go over on the minutes, put more on the credit card than you're allowed, get
- 45 more overdue charges? You badly need some money management education.

Do you have the work habit?

Want more money? Work more. Or maybe work smarter or for more money. Do you have a job?

- 50 Could you work more hours and still keep your grades up? Could you work a weekend job for more cash? Could you work full-time over the summer and save some of that money for rainy days? Getting the work habit is the key because it usually
- 55 helps with money management skills. You will start looking at that hot new gizmo and think, 'how many hours did I work to make that money?' It's a good way to start prioritizing!



Great gadgets!

Lend me your ear ... phones!

A



V-MODA Bass frequency ear buds

If you're looking for an extra pair of earphones for your MP3 player, these cute colorful and of course high quality buds are a great choice. First, their sound quality is excellent; second, they're comfy in your ear; and third, they come in a rainbow of colors to go with any MP3 player you've got. Choose from pink, orange, blue, green, black, white and red and expect to nab a pair for around \$30.

DIY Ringtones

There's so much to love about this product. Xingtone gives you an unlimited number of LEGAL cell ringtones for one price (\$20). And you can make a ringtone out of anything, including CDs, MP3s – you name it. As you know, ringtones can cost \$1.99 or more EACH! With Xingtone Ringtone Maker 5.1, you can also edit the ringtones, send them to friends' phones or make voice-recorded ringtones. Check it out at Xingtone.com



Freeline

FREELINE 'SKATES' \$120

These crazy new skates, developed in Australia, are completely unique and have revolutionized skate park tricks. Be the first in the States to grab a pair. **Wheelie good!**



SONIC BOMB ALARM CLOCK

~~\$38~~ Was \$45

Do you sleep deeper than a bear in winter? If so, you need the Sonic Bomb Alarm Clock. With 113 decibels and a mattress-shaker included in the price, **NO ONE** can sleep through it.



TENGU TOY

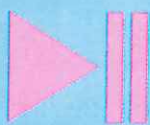
AN AMUSING FRIEND, TENGU MAGICALLY RESPONDS TO SOUNDS BY LIGHTING UP AND MAKING DIFFERENT EXPRESSIONS IN TIME TO MUSIC, YOUR VOICE OR OTHER SOUNDS. NO SOFTWARE NEEDED. \$50.00



F

San Disk Sansa Shaker MP3 Player

The Shaker is a drum-shaped MP3 player that fits right in your hand, and, as the name suggests, it has a very cool little feature; to skip from song to song, you simply shake the player!



Nifty, yes? The Shaker also comes in very cute pink or blue versions, has a terrific built-in speaker and 2 headphone outlets (comes with one pair) so you can share your tunes with someone special. A bargain for a cool player that holds 1,500 songs. \$39.99



The mother who shopped her son

Simon Hattenstone meets a parent who turned her own son over to the police



Susan Taylor says it took her about five minutes to realise the worst of it. She arrived home, opened the door, turned off the alarm and saw her laptop bag at the top of the stairs and a kitchen chair in the hall. Strange. Her husband's tool box was on the floor, tools everywhere. Susan's heart started to beat faster. She poked her head into the sitting room and there were a few DVDs scattered across the carpet. She entered her bedroom. The safe box at the bottom of the cupboard was gone – and with it, her £50,000 worth of jewellery. All that was left was a mess. The kitchen window was open, to make it look as if somebody had come in through it. But Susan, 52, wasn't sure. That window was always locked, the lock hidden. Any normal burglar would break the window, wouldn't he?

I felt sick. I knew it had to be Tom. Apart from my husband, only Tom had a key, only Tom knew the code for the alarm, only Tom knew there was a safe box in my bedroom cupboard and only Tom knew what was in it.

She tried calling her 19-year-old son, Tom. No answer. She then called the police. 'We had to have the police because of the insurance. When they arrived, they gave me a strange look and said "Does anybody else know about the alarm and have a key?" and I said, "Yeah, well, my son knew about it and I think he did it."'

We are sitting in Susan's beautiful garden in Bournemouth. It's a sunny day, her cat is purring on her knee, and it is so clear that her son's crime nearly killed her. Shortly after the robbery, she had a heart attack – her second – and she gave up her job as a fashion consultant.

She points to a small wooden shed at the bottom of the garden – that's where Tom and his friends used to smoke dope, she says. She didn't like it, but at least she knew where he was and she could keep an eye on him. She never thought he had a drug problem – he was just a typical

teenager, drinking a bit, smoking a bit, experimenting a bit. She shows me a picture of him. He looks like a young Nick Cave – cool, cheeky, likable. Susan separated from his father when Tom was only four, and she brought up her three children alone. Eight years ago, she married again. Tom had always been a handful. At infant school, a teacher told her they couldn't do anything to keep him quiet and that he was stopping the other children working. He was bright and easily bored. Susan thinks she was too soft on him, because she felt bad about his father leaving when Tom was so young.

At 15, Tom started missing school, preferring to hang out with older kids in a local café. He started a wood-working course, and got bored again. For three years, he went from job to job. Occasionally he took a tenner or £20 from Susan or his stepfather, Peter, but he would deny it. 'Peter always used to say, "One day that boy is going to get a short sharp shock from someone..." Little did he know that it was going to be from us.' She laughs, but I'm not sure she thinks it's funny.

Every day we hear of another boy (it's nearly always boys) who has got into trouble with drugs and gangs. And every day we hear calls from politicians, senior police officers, community workers – and the relatives of victims of knife crimes and shootings – for parents to keep a close watch on their children and to report them if they suspect them of a crime. In fact, cases of parents reporting their own children are few and far between.

Not surprisingly, Susan Taylor made the headlines when her

son Tom was sentenced to 40 weeks in prison for robbing his own parents. In court, it came out that Tom was also a cocaine and ecstasy user. She told journalists that reporting Tom to the police was the hardest thing she'd ever done, but that she would not have been able to live with herself if she hadn't. But still, she has no regrets about shopping him. 'It seems very simple and logical to me that if you bring up your children teaching them what is right and wrong, how then can they do something that is so clearly wrong and you turn a blind eye to it? It goes against everything you've ever done, so you just have to use tough love and report them. If you don't, all those years you were teaching them right and wrong are for absolutely nothing.'

After a month inside, Susan says he was like her old Tom. 'He was a normal, nice young man, not angry like he was before, and every time we've seen him since he's been in prison, he's got better and better. He's doing an IT course and a cookery course.'

For Susan, telling her friends what happened was very difficult. She felt ashamed. 'Imagine telling people, "We were burgled last night" "Oh no, that's awful – do you have any idea who did it?" "Yeah, Tom" "Not Tom? Your Tom?" "Yes, my Tom."' The general reaction was disbelief.

Did Tom resent the fact that she called the police? 'The first time I saw him, I said "Do you think I was wrong to turn you in?" and he said, "You didn't have any choice, and I don't blame you for it."'

Derived from: *The Guardian Weekend*, July 26 2008