

YOUNG SMOKERS

AN ATTITUDE STUDY AMONG SCHOOLCHILDREN, TOUCHING ALSO ON PARENTAL INFLUENCE

BY

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Various studies of the smoking habits of school children in different areas have been made recently. This report is not so much concerned with the actual level of smoking among a particular group of school children, but with their attitudes towards smoking, their beliefs about the effect of smoking, and the relationship between the children's habits and attitudes and the smoking habits of their parents.

METHOD

Four corporation schools in Edinburgh were involved in this inquiry, one senior secondary school, one senior secondary technical school, and two junior secondary schools. Although these schools are in different areas of the city and the children in them may well be reasonably representative of those attending non-fee-paying schools in the city, a considerable proportion of children in Edinburgh go to fee-paying schools, so that this inquiry does not in anyway represent the whole school population of the city.

Each of the four schools was visited during January, 1959, by doctors from the City Public Health Department. They went into the classes and in the absence of the teachers asked the children to fill in a simple questionnaire.† It was explained that the teachers and headmaster would not see the forms, that the information was entirely confidential as no names were required, and that absolute veracity was important. These forms were completed in the classroom without the children comparing notes, and were given directly to the doctors. The school teachers were not involved in the inquiry. As far as possible all the classes in a school were visited on the same day, so that there would be relatively little opportunity for the children to discuss the survey and the replies would be spontaneous.

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† See Appendix.

Although there were 4,180 children at these four schools at the time of the inquiry, only 3,224 forms were completed (77 per cent.). The reasons for the discrepancy were a high absentee rate because of an epidemic of influenza, and the inability of the doctors to cover classes which were engaged on any special activity outside the school.

LEVEL OF SMOKING

The proportion of children who smoked was smaller than that found in similar studies near London (London School of Hygiene, 1959) and in the Isle of Wight.* One-third of the boys and two-thirds of the girls said that they had never smoked; just over one-quarter of the boys and only one in twelve of the girls stated they had smoked in the last 4 weeks (Table I).

TABLE I
PERCENTAGE SMOKING HABITS, BY SEX

Smoking Habits		Boys	Girls
Never smoked		34·8	66·5
Had smoked, but not in last 4 weeks		35·6	21·2
Smoked in last 4 weeks (usual number of cigarettes per week)	Less than 1	6·2	2·6
	1-4	6·5	2·9
	5-9	4·6	1·0
	10-14	3·0	0·5
	15-19	1·6	0·2
	20-29	2·2	0·2
30-39	1·1	0·1	
40 or More	1·0	—	
Inadequate Answer		3·4	4·8
Sample† (= 100 per cent.)		1,578	1,568

† 78 children failed to record their sex.

Nearly one-quarter of the boys who had smoked in the last 4 weeks (*i.e.* 6·2 per cent. of the boys' sample), can hardly be regarded as regular smokers since they smoked less than one cigarette a week on the average, while a further quarter of this group was smoking only from one to four cigarettes a week. About 12 per cent. of all the boys claimed to smoke as much as one cigarette a day regularly, just under 5 per cent. were smoking twenty a week or more, and

*Personal communication from the Principal School Medical Officer.

1 per cent. claimed to smoke forty cigarettes a week or more.

Girls were less likely to have smoked at all than boys and had smoked relatively smaller amounts. Only 1 per cent. of all the girls in the inquiry said they usually smoked at least ten cigarettes a week.

An analysis by age showed that 17 per cent. of all the boys aged 11 or 12 had smoked in the last 4 weeks, and this proportion rose to 39 per cent. of those aged 14. After this age proportionately fewer children smoked. This is possibly because children who smoke are unlikely to stay on at school after they are 15 years old. The London inquiry (London School of Hygiene, 1959) suggested that smoking was more prevalent in the lower streams of secondary schools.

Among children aged 11 and 12 smoking was more common in the junior secondary or senior technical schools than in the senior secondary schools, both in the proportion who had ever smoked and the proportion who had smoked in the last 4 weeks (Table II). Among the 13 and 14-year-olds there was less difference between the types of school, though again the proportion who had smoked in the last 4 weeks tended to be lowest in the

senior secondary schools. For the children aged 15 and over no consistent differences emerge, but this may be because of the processes of selection involved after this age.

To enter a senior secondary school, whether it is technical or not, children have to pass an examination at the age of 11, and such schools are thus, to some extent, similar to English grammar schools. Most of the children in the senior secondary technical school leave at the age of 15, whereas the other senior secondary school provides education to University entrance level. The secondary junior schools are comparable to the English secondary modern schools, and the great majority of children in these schools leave at the age of 15.

The differences in this inquiry between types of school were not so marked or so consistent as those found between the secondary grammar and secondary modern schools in the London inquiry.

The amount smoked by boys increased rapidly with age. Amongst those who had smoked in the last 4 weeks, nearly half of those aged 11 or 12 said they usually smoked less than one cigarette a week, and only one-sixth of those aged 14 or more said this, while the proportion smoking 20 or more a week

TABLE II
VARIATIONS IN PROPORTION OF CHILDREN WHO SMOKED, WITH AGE, SEX, AND TYPE OF SCHOOL

Sex	Type of School	Age (yrs)	Percentage who had ever smoked	Percentage who had smoked in last 4 weeks	Number of Children (= 100 per cent.)
Boys	Junior Secondary	11, 12	58	20	227
		13	67	23	235
		14	73	42	284
		15	58	36	31
		16	—	—	—
		17 and Over	—	—	—
	Senior Technical	11, 12	59	20	104
		13	59	20	119
		14	76	39	62
		15	53	30	30
		16	—	—	—
		17 and Over	—	—	—
	Senior Secondary	11, 12	33	2	63
		13	59	19	70
		14	70	30	105
15		73	33	67	
16		63	33	43	
17 and Over		63	33	33	
Girls	Junior Secondary	11, 12	21	4	238
		13	31	7	256
		14	45	17	286
		15	28	3	29
		16	—	—	—
		17 and Over	—	—	—
	Senior Technical	11, 12	11	1	105
		13	37	11	91
		14	41	9	79
		15	—	—	—
		16	—	—	—
		17 and Over	—	—	—
	Senior Secondary	12	8	3	86
		13	7	1	73
		14	48	12	86
15		33	8	72	
16		27	8	26	
17 and Over		—	—	—	

rose from 3 per cent. at ages 11 and 12 to 34 per cent. for those aged 15 and over (Table III).

TABLE III
AMOUNT SMOKED BY BOYS WHO HAD SMOKED DURING THE LAST 4 WEEKS, BY AGE (PER CENT.)

Amount Smoked (Cigarettes per week)	Age (yrs)			
	11, 12	13	14	15 and Over
Less than 1	48	28	15	17
1-4	25	28	25	22
5-9	9	21	22	8
10-14	9	12	13	10
15-19	5	2	7	7
20-29	—	5	9	17
30 or More	3	2	7	17
Not Stated	1	2	2	12
Total Children Smoking (= 100 per cent.)	67	91	175	72

PARENTS

SMOKING HABITS.—Half the mothers and three-quarters of the fathers of this group of children smoked regularly, according to the children. This agrees reasonably well with current estimates of the proportion of smokers in the general population (Tobacco Manufacturers' Standing Committee, 1959). This suggests that the children completed the questionnaires reasonably accurately.

When neither the child's mother nor his father smoked regularly, the child was less likely to do so than when either of his or her parents smoked. The proportion of "smokers" (*i.e.* those who said they had smoked during the last 4 weeks) was 29 per cent. among boys both of whose parents smoked and only 16 per cent. when neither parent smoked; for girls the corresponding proportions were 9 per cent. and 3 per cent. The proportions who had smoked but not in the last four weeks were not influenced by the parents' smoking habits to the same extent (Table IV).

KNOWLEDGE OF AND ATTITUDE TO CHILDREN'S SMOKING.—Children who had smoked during the last 4 weeks were asked whether their parents knew that they smoked. Their answers indicate that about half the children who smoked believed that their parents were unaware of it (Table V).

TABLE IV
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SMOKING HABITS OF CHILDREN AND PARENTS (PER CENT.)

Sex	Parents who smoke	Children Smoking Habits	Boys			Girls		
			Both	One	Neither	Both	One	Neither
		Never smoked	32	36	43	61	69	75
		Smoked but not in last 4 weeks	36	36	38	24	20	19
		Smoked in last 4 weeks	29	25	16	9	8	3
		Inadequate answer	3	3	3	6	3	3
		No. of children (= 100 per cent.)	547	653	261	556	670	241

TABLE V
PARENTS' KNOWLEDGE OF CHILDREN'S SMOKING HABITS, PER CENT.

Parents who Know	Boys (age in yrs)			Girls (All Ages)
	Under 14	14 and Over	All Ages	
Both	22	33	30	22
Mother Only	10	19	15	15
Father Only	2	2	2	4
Neither	59	43	49	57
Not Answered	7	3	4	2
No. of Children Smoking (= 100 per cent.)	157	246	420	122

Several children thought their mother knew they smoked while their father did not, but only very few thought that their father was the only one who knew. Younger boys thought that their parents were aware of their smoking habits less frequently than older boys. If answers here reflect the actual state of knowledge, parents are less likely to know if their daughters smoke than if their sons do.

These differences possibly arise because younger boys, and girls of all ages, tend to smoke less than boys of 14 or more, and because parental knowledge of smoking is highly correlated with the amount smoked. This is shown by an analysis of boy "smokers" aged 14. The proportion who said neither parent knew that they smoked fell from 71 per cent. of those who smoked less than five cigarettes a week, to 42 per cent. of those smoking between five and nine cigarettes a week, and to 21 per cent. of those smoking ten or more.

It is not, of course, possible from these data to reach any conclusions about the cause and effect of this relationship. Presumably the parents of a child who smokes frequently are more likely to find out about it by chance than the parents of a child who only smokes occasionally. On the other hand, if parents are aware of a child's desire to smoke and do not disapprove, it may be much easier for the child to obtain cigarettes and to be in a position to smoke ten or more cigarettes in a week.

It would not seem that parents very often give their children cigarettes directly, but the provision of

sufficient pocket money may well be an important factor. When children who had smoked during the last 4 weeks were asked how they got these cigarettes only 4 per cent. said that they had obtained them from their parents with their parents' knowledge (Table VI).

TABLE VI
HOW CIGARETTES WERE OBTAINED, PER CENT.*

Method		Per cent.
Bought from ..	Machine	13
	Tobacconist .. .	18
	Other Shop .. .	55
	Person not Shop ..	2
From parents ..	With their knowledge ..	4
	Without their knowledge ..	4
Given	By brother or sister ..	6
	By friends	34
Other methods		3
No Answer		1
Number of Children Smoking (= 100 per cent.) ..		544

* Several children gave more than one answer so the percentages add to over 100

The most common way for children to obtain cigarettes was to buy them themselves, and the other main method was to be given them by their friends. Unfortunately no data are available about the employment of these children, which may have been an important method of obtaining money for the purchase of cigarettes.

Children who said that either or both of their parents knew that they smoked were asked whether their parents tried to discourage them from smoking in any way, or whether they did not mind. Slightly less than one in five of these children said their parents did not mind, 71 per cent. said their parents tried to discourage them, and 11 per cent. were either unaware of their parents' attitude or did not answer this question. The proportion of parents who disapproved did not vary significantly between boys and girls but was higher for younger than for older boys.

Parental attitudes were related to some extent to their own smoking habits (Table VII), but even so 10 per cent. of the children with non-smoking parents maintained that their parents did not mind their smoking, and 66 per cent. of the children whose parents both smoked said that their parents tried to discourage them from smoking.

There was a significant difference between the children at the two types of school; 21 per cent. of parents did not mind their smoking, the corresponding proportion of the children at junior secondary schools (23 per cent.) was nearly twice as great. These differences in the attitudes of the parents of

TABLE VII
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS' SMOKING HABITS AND THEIR ATTITUDE TO THEIR CHILD'S SMOKING (PER CENT.)

Attitude to Child's Smoking	Parents who Smoke		
	Both	One	Neither
Does not mind	23	12	10
Tries to discourage .. .	66	80	90
Not known or not answered ..	11	8	—
Number of Children Smoking (= 100 per cent.)	105	100	21

the children at senior secondary schools compared with only 14 per cent. of those at junior secondary schools came from homes where both parents were non-smokers. In addition whereas 12 per cent. of the children at the senior secondary schools said their children in the junior and senior schools was not simply a reflection of their own smoking habits: for example, where only one parent smoked, there was still a difference between the proportion of children who said their parents did not mind their smoking (only 2 per cent. in the senior secondary schools and 22 per cent. in junior secondary schools).

BELIEFS OF CHILDREN ABOUT SMOKING AND HEALTH

When asked whether they thought smoking could be bad for the health, an overwhelming majority of children, 90 per cent. of boys and 93 per cent. of girls said "Yes" (Table VIII). Only 8 per cent. of boys and 6 per cent. of girls gave a negative reply to this question, while 2 per cent. of boys and 1 per cent. of girls either did not record an answer or were unwilling to commit themselves. Those who smoked were rather less likely to believe that it could be harmful to health. This relationship has also been observed among adults (Cartwright and Martin, 1958) and among doctors (Pyke, 1955).

TABLE VIII
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SMOKING HABITS AND BELIEFS ABOUT SMOKING AND HEALTH

Sex	Smoking Habits	Percentage believing smoking bad for health	Number of Children (= 100 per cent.)
Boys	Never smoked	95	550
	Smoked but not in last 4 weeks .. .	93	561
	Smoked in last 4 weeks .. .	77	422
	All boys	90	1,578
Girls	Never smoked	94	1,041
	Smoked but not in last 4 weeks .. .	92	332
	Smoked in last 4 weeks .. .	79	121
	All girls	93	1,568

When asked in what way smoking could be bad for health, the most frequent reply (given by 55 per cent. of the boys and 60 per cent. of girls) was that

it could cause cancer (Table IX). A further 13 per cent. of boys and 12 per cent. of girls said that it was bad for the lungs but did not mention cancer. Various other conditions were thought to be caused by smoking, but apart from a cough none of these was mentioned by even as many as one-tenth of the boys or girls. Boys were more inclined than girls to connect smoking with breathlessness, and to mention its effect on performance in sport.

TABLE IX
RESPONDENT'S BELIEFS ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF
SMOKING ON HEALTH (PER CENT.)

Effect of Smoking on Health	Boys	Girls
It causes cancer	55	60
It causes tuberculosis	2	4
It causes a cough	4	10
It causes breathlessness, short-windedness	6	2
It is bad for lungs (cancer <i>not</i> mentioned)	13	12
It affects the heart	1	1
It affects the eyes	1	—
It affects the stomach	1	1
It affects growth	1	1
It is bad for sport	3	1
Other specific effects	6	8
It affects health but respondent does not know how	12	11
It is not bad for health	8	6
Inadequate answer	2	1
Number of Children (= 100 per cent.)	1,578	1,568

The proportion mentioning cancer was considerably higher than that found in the Isle of Wight. Both the boys and girls in the non-technical senior secondary schools mentioned cancer appreciably less often than the children in the other schools, but apart from this and the relationship with smoking habits, no significant variations were found in the answers to this question until the children were questioned about their ambitions in relation to smoking (Question 11).

AMBITIONS AND ATTITUDES OF CHILDREN

The final question was: "When you leave school or finish your education and start to earn your own money, do you hope you will smoke or not?" The children were also asked to give the reasons for their reply.

The great majority (88 per cent. of the boys and 96 per cent. of the girls) said they hoped that they would not smoke when they left school. 8 per cent. of boys and 3 per cent. of girls hoped that they would smoke, and 4 per cent. of boys and 1 per cent. of girls either could not make up their minds or did not answer the question (Table X). The proportion who intended to smoke was much greater amongst the present "smokers" than among the non-smokers, but even among the boys who had smoked in the last 4 weeks, three-quarters presumably hoped to stop smoking as they said they would prefer not to smoke when they left school.

TABLE X
RELATION OF PROPORTIONS HOPING THEY WOULD
SMOKE WHEN THEY LEFT SCHOOL TO PRESENT SMOKING
HABITS (PER CENT.)

Sex	Smoking Habits	Percentage hoping they would smoke when they left school	Number of Children (= 100 per cent.)
Boys	Never smoked	0.9	550
	Smoked but not in last 4 weeks	4.5	561
	Smoked in last 4 weeks	24.2	422
	All boys	8.4	1,578
Girls	Never smoked	1.3	1,041
	Smoked but not in last 4 weeks	2.4	332
	Smoked in last 4 weeks	14.9	121
	All girls	2.6	1,568

The children's intentions about smoking were also related to their parents' smoking habits (Table XI). Among all the three groups of boys, those who never smoked, those who had smoked but not in the last 4 weeks, and those who had smoked during the last 4 weeks, the proportion who hoped they would smoke after they left school was lowest for those with two non-smoking parents. Interestingly enough, the proportion was highest, not in the group of boys in which both parents smoked, but in the group of boys whose mothers smoked but whose fathers did not. However, the numbers involved were small. The proportion of girls who hoped they would smoke was too low to make a useful analysis.

TABLE XI
PROPORTION WHO HOPE THEY WILL SMOKE ANALYSED
BY THEIR OWN AND THEIR PARENTS' SMOKING HABITS
(BOYS ONLY)

Child's Smoking Habits	Parents' Smoking Habits	Percentage who hope they will smoke	Number of Children (= 100 per cent.)
Has never smoked	Both smoke	1.1	177
	Father only smokes	1.1	182
	Mother only smokes	2.2	45
	Neither smokes	—	108
Has smoked but not in last 4 weeks	Both smoke	4.3	187
	Father only smokes	5.5	182
	Mother only smokes	6.3	48
	Neither smokes	2.1	97
Smoked in last 4 weeks	Both smoke	25.2	151
	Father only smokes	23.5	119
	Mother only smokes	34.3	38
	Neither smokes	18.6	43

Among those who hoped they would smoke there was a relatively high proportion who thought smoking was not bad for health (36 per cent. of the boys and 29 per cent. of the girls), whereas only 6 per cent. of both boys and girls who hoped they would not smoke thought smoking was not bad for health.

Health was mentioned by an appreciable number

of children in giving reasons for hoping they would not smoke (Table XII), but the most frequent reasons were financial. Many said simply that smoking was a waste of money, while quite a number said they would rather spend their money on other things: clothes, a car, a motor-bike, dances, drink, sweets, and taking girl friends out were all mentioned here. One boy, a non-smoker, said: "My own father wastes over a pound on them every week".

TABLE XII

RESPONDENTS' REASONS FOR HOPING THEY WOULD NOT SMOKE WHEN THEY LEFT SCHOOL (PER CENT)

Reason	Boys	Girls
Waste of money or money could be put to other/better use	66	55
Bad for health (cancer not mentioned)	26	27
Causes cancer	10	11
Not good for sport	3	—
A dirty, unattractive, bad habit	6	25
An addiction, difficult to give up	3	5
Does not give pleasure	3	3
Stains fingers	1	3
Is a bad influence	1	—
Other reasons	3	3
Do not know	9	9
Number hoping they would not smoke† (= 100 per cent.)	1,390	1,506

† Several respondents gave more than one reason.

A few children seemed to have rather an exaggerated idea about the amount of money they might save by not smoking: "If you saved all the money you spent on cigarettes you could be a rich man", and "If I don't smoke I might save £1,000,000".

Although only one in ten children mentioned cancer specifically in reply to this question, a number of the others who gave health reasons presumably had this danger in mind. "Because I want to live a bit longer", and "Because I do not want to die young" are replies which suggest a very literal acceptance of the danger of smoking.

The proportion mentioning health factors was similar for boys and girls, but whereas the boys were more concerned about the financial aspect, the girls more frequently condemned smoking as an unattractive, anti-social habit. A number apparently confined this feeling to their own sex, such as those who said: "I don't like to see a girl smoking", "For a girl to smoke I think it is common", "I think that women look very uncouth when they smoke. I do approve of men smoking because they can stand up for the worst". Others made more general comments, such as "It makes you slovenly" and "It is a horrible habit". Girls were more concerned about the discolouration of their fingers, while boys mentioned the harmful effects in relation to sport more frequently.

A fear of addiction was expressed by a number of

children, one of whom said, "Many people can buy cigarettes but can't look after their family and that is because smoking has got a hold on them and they can't do without a smoke". Other diverse replies included, "My mother tells me she wishes she had never started to smoke", "I don't want a bad name in my area" and "I don't think I'll need stimulants of that kind".

Many of the children who hoped they would smoke gave no reason for this wish. The most frequent answer was simply that they enjoyed it, and a number said they thought it soothing or that it helped them to relax. "It makes you relax and forget you troubles" was one reply. Five boys and two girls said they just could not stop smoking. One or two obviously saw it as a symbol of manhood: "I would feel more grown up", "I hope I can smoke because I think it is a grown-up thing and I want to be grown-up", "Makes you feel like a man", "I want to smoke a pipe". One apparently sophisticated girl aged 12 who smoked five to nine cigarettes a week said here, "It is only one or two who get cancer". A number of replies indicated that smoking was regarded as a social pastime: "Because other folk smoke", "To give some to my mother". One girl who did not really hope to smoke when she left school said, "I will smoke a little in company to be polite". Finally, there was the boy aged 14 who said, "I hope I will smoke occasionally because I shall have to do something to pass the time at work".

DISCUSSION

Only a small proportion of this group of school children hoped that they personally would smoke when they left school, so that many children who smoke at school are not anxious to continue this practice when they leave. Although less than 1 per cent. of the children in this study said, categorically, that they could not give up smoking, it seems likely that many more, in spite of their ambitions for the future, have drifted into a habit which they will find difficult to break.

Awareness of the chief disadvantages of smoking, its expense and danger to health, has not enabled a considerable proportion of children to withstand its attractions or the social pressure involved in being offered a cigarette by a pal. While many children buy their own cigarettes, one-third of those who smoke are given at least some of their cigarettes by their friends. The probable influence of other social factors in their home is revealed by the association between the smoking habits of children and parents. This association may be genetical but, of course, not necessarily so, since similarities between children and parents in patterns of behaviour can result from

social and cultural pressures. Even parents who are smokers usually attempt to discourage their children from smoking, but they are slightly less likely to do this than if they are non-smokers.

Children in junior secondary schools are slightly more likely to smoke than those in senior secondary schools, but this may not be an effect of the school, since children in the former group more often had parents who smoke themselves and did not discourage their children from doing so.

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APPENDIX
 PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

School
 Class
 Age last Birthday
 Sex: Boy Girl

Put a tick beside your answer to each question

(1) Have you EVER smoked? Yes
 No

If NO—that is if you have NEVER smoked—go on to Question 8

(2) Have you smoked at all during the last four weeks? Yes
 No

If No—that is if you have NOT smoked during the last 4 weeks—go on to Question 8

(3) Do you usually smoke:
 Less than 1 cigarette a WEEK
 From 1-4 cigarettes a WEEK
 5-9 cigarettes a WEEK
 10-14 cigarettes a WEEK
 15-19 cigarettes a WEEK
 20-29 cigarettes a WEEK
 30-39 cigarettes a WEEK
 40 or more cigarettes a WEEK
 (say how many in a WEEK)

(4) How old were you when you started to smoke ONE OR MORE CIGARETTES A WEEK?
 Never....., Under 8....., 8....., 9.....,
 10....., 11....., 12....., 13....., 14.....,
 15....., 16....., 17 or more

(5) How do you usually get your cigarettes?
 Buy them yourself from machine
 Buy them yourself from tobacconist, that is, a shop that sells only cigarettes and tobacco
 Buy them yourself from a shop that sells other things as well

Buy them from a person—not a shop
 From parents—with their knowledge
 From parents—without their knowledge
 Given to you by your brother or sister
 Given to you by friends
 Other method—please say how

(6) Do your parents know that you smoke at all?
 Yes, both parents know
 Mother only knows
 Father only knows
 Neither mother nor father knows

(7) If either or both of your parents know you smoke, do they try to discourage you from smoking—in any way—or don't they mind?
 Don't mind
 Try to discourage
 Don't know

(8) Does your father smoke regularly—that is, every day?
 Yes
 No

(9) Does your mother smoke regularly—that is, every day?
 Yes
 No

(10) Do you think smoking can be bad for people's health in any way?
 Yes, can be bad
 No

If YES, in what way?

(11) When you leave school or finish your education and start to earn your own money do you hope you will smoke or not?
 Hope you will smoke
 Hope you won't smoke
 Why do you hope that?

Please fold this sheet in two