

Changes During Adolescence

BONUS: Teenage Worrying Behaviors and Signs



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What Changes Should I Expect During Adolescence

Introduction

Parents often approach the teenage years with the fear of the unknown, especially with their first child. Up until now their child was fairly predictable, liked to accompany them places and, generally speaking, home was a calm and peaceful place. But parents often feel challenged when their children enter their teenage years as teenagers seem to prefer the company of their friends, have a greater need for privacy and independence, and can become challenging and critical of parents.

For the young person this is a time of intense change, occurring at many levels – physical, psychological and social. These changes can occur at intervals or all at the one time. It is this high level of change that brings new challenges to both parents and teenagers. When parents understand the intense change their teenage child is experiencing, it can benefit them in their parenting role and help them to maintain a positive relationship with their son or daughter.

Understanding the Changes Your Child is Going Through Can Help You Through This Difficult Time in Their Lives.



Changes occur for young people due to physical development and hormonal changes in their bodies.

These changes happen in the following areas – **physical, psychological, emotional and behavioral.**

These areas will be described in detail in the different stages as follows:

- Early adolescence (10–13)
- Mid-adolescence (14–16)
- Late adolescence (17–19)

What to Expect as Your Child Experiences Adolescence

10-13 year old

Physical Changes

- Have sudden growth spurts (boys and girls).
- Have an increase in appetite (boys and girls).
- Develop body hair: underarms, pubic region and chest hair in boys.
- Show the development of breasts in girls with slight weight gain and broadening of hips.
- Have onset of periods for girls.
- Show the development of the sexual organs in boys.
- Have spontaneous erections and wet dreams in boys.
- Show the development of pimples/acne (boys and girls)
- See voice changes for boys.

Psychological Changes

- Begin to develop more abstract thinking and ask philosophical questions such as “Why does God let wars happen?”
- Challenge parent’s behavior “Why do you tell me not to lie when you do?”
- Begin to question parents’ authority.
- Look outside the family for role models or to their own personal heroes such as athletes, movie and pop stars.
- Still need parents’ support in helping them to choose between right and wrong.
- Begin to reflect on their identity.
- Begin to identify their maleness or femaleness and like to spend time with their own gender.
- Display interests and talents such as in music, sport, debating, etc.
- Start to become self-conscious.

Emotional Changes

10-13 year old, continued

- Become moody and withdrawn.
- Experience many emotions, especially fear, which is often expressed as anger.
- Feel safer expressing anger at home than in the outside world.
- Start to look for emotional support from peers, especially at school.
- Feel socially awkward and self-conscious.
- Worry about unwanted attention from boys (particularly girls who are maturing quicker than peers). Late maturing boys may fear they will never catch up with friends who are maturing faster.
- Appear to reject parents but at the same time need parental support and love.
- Need to know they are loved unconditionally by parents.
- Start to become aware of sexual feelings in relation to their own bodies rather than in a relationship.

Behavioral Changes

- Begin to withdraw from parents and want to spend more time with friends, though usually only in school or home settings.
- Like to share activities with children of the same sex.
- Begin to challenge authority figures in general and start to realise that parents don't know everything.
- Start to reject parents.
- Have secrets and have a need for some privacy but at the same time have a need to be safe.

14 - 16 year old

Physical Changes

- Have faster growth rates (boys and girls)
- Show greater development of breasts for girls and sexual organs in boys.
- Have a need for more sleep and food (boys and girls).

Psychological Changes

- Develop greater reasoning, imagination and wider understanding in general and consider "What if...?"
- Have the ability for abstract thinking and be able to generate solutions.
- Have intelligent debates on many issues and may look for a cause or commitment to things like politics, religion, the environment and animal rights.
- Become very idealistic and have a greater interest in philosophy and examine moral dilemmas from different points of view.
- One day appear mature and the next day seem childish.
- Fly off the handle and seem to have a lack of thought for others.
- Become very passionate about things.
- Become very self-conscious and think everyone is admiring them and at the same time be self critical.
- Think the world is exciting but overwhelming at the same time.
- Become confused by multimedia messages about appearance.
- Believe the world revolves around them and have grandiose ideas about their lives.
- Believe that they are safe from accidents, illness and death.

Emotional Changes

14 - 16 year old, continued

- Want to exert more independence than before.
- Need to be around friends more.
- Need to feel loved and supported by parents.
- Have strong feelings in romantic relationships.
- Have difficulty understanding feelings of sadness and worry, and these are often expressed as anger.
- Continue to be preoccupied with body image – both boys and girls – and may worry a lot.
- Feel less sure of their identity than before and become more self-conscious.
- Become very idealistic and challenge parents' values and attitudes, especially if they consider them to be "unfair".

Behavioral Changes

- Have a greater need for independence than before.
- Sometimes feel very confident and take risks, such as experimenting with alcohol or drugs. They may pretend they are older and try to get into night clubs or bars, especially if in a group.
- Start to show the world who they are by wearing particular clothes, shoes, dressing in black, dying hair and having a piercing and/or tattoo.
- Learn the skills of friendship by giving support, showing empathy, trust and honesty.

- Start spending more time with friends and going further afield with them.
- One day appear mature and the opposite the next day.
- Express the opposite to parents' values, especially in relation to religion and politics.
- Begin to notice what parents do rather than what they say, for example will challenge a parent who demands them to be in on time but who is late picking them up.
- Be self-centered yet caring and learn how to solve conflict.
- Begin to become exposed to the world of alcohol, drugs and sexual relationships.
- Have heightened sexual energy and may be prone to exaggeration in this area.
- Test the limits in many areas yet they need to clearly understand them and know the consequences when limits are not kept.

17 - 19 year old

Physical Changes

- Show less dramatic changes in growth as teenagers of this age appear physically mature, though growth may continue for a few more years.

Psychological Changes

- Appear mature though worry about adulthood.

Emotional Changes

- Worry about life choices and need support and guidance from parents.
- Feel a strong impact when romantic relationships break up and need parent's support.
- Worry about their parents when they move out of home or move on with their own lives.

Behavioral Changes

- Become more exposed to alcohol, drugs and risky sexual behaviour and experience problems around these.
- Appear mature and confident but need parents support with career, work, relationships and choices in general.

It is important to **set appropriate limits** for adolescents and **to help teenagers keep to these limits**.

Worrying Behaviors and Signs Your Child Needs Professional Help

1. Becoming withdrawn and losing interest in friends, sports or favorite activities
2. Having changes in sleep patterns such as not sleeping or sleeping for long periods.
3. Avoiding food, over eating and/or excessively exercising. Sudden decrease or increase in appetite.
4. Seeming to be preoccupied or obsessed about a particular issue.
5. Having a change in mood, becoming hostile or having feelings of anxiety or depression.
6. Missing classes, a drop in school grades, ignoring school work or repeatedly leaving school early.
7. Doing things that don't make sense to others.
8. Seeing or hearing things that nobody else sees or hears.
9. Being excessively tired or neglecting personal hygiene.
10. Wearing long sleeved clothes in hot weather and avoiding places like swimming pools. It may suggest they are hiding signs of self-harm.
11. Loss of interest in family, hobbies or sporting activities.
12. Excessive mood swings.
13. Uncharacteristic withdrawal from responsibilities and disrespect for family rules.
14. Being verbally or physically abusive.
15. Disappearance of valuable items and/or money.
16. Repeatedly staying out late without adequate explanation.
17. Not telling you where they are going.
18. Makes excuses for their behavior.
19. Telling lies about their whereabouts and activities.
20. If you find cigarette rolling paper, pipes, small plastic bags, etc. in their belongings.

If your son or daughter has two or more of these behaviors, it's not too late. A therapeutic residential program may be the answer for your child.



Contact us to find a Residential Treatment Program for Your Teen

Sources: [Tusla](#) and [Barnados](#) 2015 Publication, [Wikipedia](#) and [Psychology Today](#)



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