



A monthly publication provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education.

Resources for Families

Understanding your teenager

The teen years aren't easy – for the teens or for the people around them. For teens, they are a time of self-discovery and pulling away from parental oversight, an important milestone for reaching independence.

For their parents or guardians, the teen years can be a challenge and a period of conflict with a growing child who was previously easy to understand and enjoyable to be around.

In transition

Developmentally, there is a lot happening with teens. Teenagers are growing physically, emotionally and intellectually at a very fast rate.

“Many kids announce the onset of adolescence with a dramatic change in behavior around their parents. They're starting to separate from mom and dad and become more independent. At the same time, kids this age are increasingly aware of how others, especially their peers, see them and are desperately trying to fit in. Their peers often become much more important than parents as far as making decisions.

Kids often start “trying on” different looks and identities, and they become very aware of how they differ from their peers, which can result in episodes of distress and conflict with parents.”

KidsHealth: A Parent's Guide to Surviving the Teen Years,
<http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/adolescence.html#>

Observations about today's teens

In addition to managing feelings from physical and emotional changes, teens are affected by the cultural climate and current events.

Tim Elmore, founder of Growing Leaders, a student leadership training program, has identified several general characteristics of today's teens that may be helpful in understanding this generation of teens:

- They question their former obsession with good grades and college acceptance.
- They have begun to see they have little understanding of stewardship of time or money.
- They want to explore the future, but many are paralyzed when faced with so many options.
- They despise society's moral decay, but most admit to cheating at school and on resumes.
- They are often at odds with their own beliefs and values, and feel they must grow up too fast.
- They feel less prepared for life after school and often return home after graduation from post-secondary training.
<http://bit.ly/2bOrK6H>

Normal adolescent development

Understanding how teens behave and feel is an important first step in communicating effectively with your child. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry has identified general characteristics for early, middle and late adolescent stages.

Each age group includes a list of feelings and behaviors that characterize movement toward independence, career interests, sexuality, and ethics and self-direction. The lists provide helpful guidelines about typical teen feelings. If you are wondering about what is normal for your teen, this is a good reference.

http://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_f/F-122.pdf

Another good source is from HealthLink BC

- 11-14 year old teens:
<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/te7233>
- 15-18 year old teens:
<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/te7221>



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Helpful tips for better communication

Tips from behavioural experts can help navigate the teen years successfully. These tips are from “A Parent’s Guide to Surviving the Teen Years.”

<http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/adolescence.html#>

- **Talk to kids early and often.** Open the lines of communication early, so your child will continue to talk to you as they grow. Answer questions about their bodies and pay attention to comments they make about physical changes. Don’t overload them with information, but be sure to respond when they ask.
- **Pick your battles.** Clothing choices and hair color are ways that teens express themselves. If they choose a color or style that you think is outrageous, they may be trying to test their limits with you. If it’s temporary and harmless, it may be best to let it go and save the objections for riskier behaviour like tobacco, drugs and alcohol.
- **Set expectations.** Although they may object, teens want expectations for their behaviour that show you care about them. Set guidelines for your teen about grades, behaviour and house rules.
- **Watch for warning signs.** Your teen is changing, but drastic or sudden change may mean a problem that requires professional help from a counselor or doctor. Watch for these warning signs about possible underlying issues:
 - extreme weight gain or loss
 - sleep problems
 - rapid, drastic changes in personality
 - sudden change in friends
 - skipping school often
 - falling grades
 - talk or even jokes about suicide
 - signs of tobacco, alcohol, or drug use
 - run-ins with the law

Some additional tips (from

<https://www.empoweringparents.com/article/5-secrets-for-communicating-with-teenagers/>) that might be helpful for communicating with teens:

- Try to put yourself in their shoes, and express understanding first
- Take your emotion out of the equation
- Ask questions that are ‘curious’ questions, rather than loaded questions
- Don’t ‘need’ your child
- Avoid taking action until you’ve calmed down