

# **Living With Your Adolescent**

The adolescent years are the in-between years when a pre-teen or teen is neither a child nor an adult. These are the years of many physical and emotional changes which cause confusion and frustration.

The adolescent years are growing-up years, but the road is usually bumpy, and to go forward, the teen sometimes has to take a couple of steps backward.

These are exciting years for the young person seeking independence. They can also be confusing years for the teen who has to adjust to a new body. They can be scary years for the adolescent who has to give up the security of childhood, and take on the responsibilities of adulthood.

In this country, adolescence takes a long time- -usually involving the ages of 11 -17 years. It's a tough job; the teenager needs the help and understanding of his parents to emerge as a responsible and caring person.

However, misunderstandings sometimes make it hard for parents and teenagers to get together during the adolescent years. Your child, who is trying to gain a new sense of individuality and independence, may reject his parents' help, and reach out to his friends. The teenager may view his parents as adults who are trying to hold him back, tell him what to do, and restrict his freedom.

Also, parents may be confused or frightened by the sudden changes in their adolescent. They may be impatient with this new challenge to their authority. They may be upset with his changing moods. They may worry about his activities with his friends, especially since he is less willing to tell his parents what he feels, where he is going, and what he is doing.

## **Parents are Human**

Parents sometimes think they have to be right all the time. Parents are human; they can make mistakes, and they have feelings, too. Parents can get angry, upset, depressed. Parents can say and do the "wrong" things sometimes. Why not accept this as part of living, and go on from there. Instead of trying to be perfect, and live up to an ideal image of a parent, why not admit to yourself and your kids that you make mistakes sometimes just like everyone else. Sharing your feelings with your children helps them see adults more realistically, and gives them truer models of adult life.

Think of adolescent growth as a puzzle, although each piece is different, each stage builds on the previous one. When the last piece is snapped in place, you have the satisfaction of knowing you helped to create a beautiful, unique and wonderful human being. These descriptions are meant to be a guide. Each child grows and develops at his or her own pace.

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<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>11 Year Old</u></b> <b><u>Begins Search for New Self</u></b></p> <p>Biological changes speed up - increased energy output and appetite; always in motion, restless, talkative. Psychological changes are abrupt; suddenly change from easy-going ten-year-old to peaks of emotional intensity; mood swings from day to day; but often unaware of the effects of these moods on others. Crude beginning of new self-identity; challenges parents, argumentative, sometimes obnoxious, and sometimes angry and defensive at home. Better behavior at school, club meetings and with peers than at home. Inquisitive and can work hard at a project of his/her own choosing. Interpersonal social skills at beginning stages - -boys more socially awkward than girls; many ups and down in friendships; boys and girls secretly interested in each other but uncomfortable in showing it; often boys and girls at this age don't get along well with each other; much teasing. Require firm, but understanding guidance from adults.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>12 Year Old</u></b> <b><u>Begins To Find New Self</u></b></p> <p>Twelve is a more integrated year than 11; more outgoing, reasonable and tolerant with a dash of humor, but still with some challenging and questioning. Extreme enthusiasm again for tasks of own choosing; likes debates and discussions, and sports. Sometimes show fatigue and moodiness; but quickly recover; appetite is still enormous. More interested in boy-girl relationships and activities; girls still more sophisticated in these relationships than boys. Physically, girls mature rapidly; both boys and girls show decided interest in their sexuality.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>13 Year Old</u></b> <b><u>Inner Directed</u></b></p> <p>Preoccupied with self, worries about everything; appearance, school, etc. Stares in the mirror to see how he/she really looks. Moody, sulks and pouts, sensitive, withdraws from family. Not willing to talk, secretive, feelings easily hurt. Withdraw inward to cope with all the new changes in himself to sort himself out and develop a new identify.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>14 Year Old</u></b> <b><u>More Self-Accepting</u></b></p> <p>More outgoing and positive, gets along better with family members, more interest in opposite sex and social gatherings and peer groups become more important. Find security in peer group, pressure to conform just as we adult conform to our peer groups. Girls are sexually young women, boys still awkward physically. Can grasp abstract ideas. Becoming thinkers, introspective, question values and lifestyles.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>15 Year Old</u></b> <b><u>Self Identity</u></b></p> <p>Detached from family; prefers peers, new drive for independence and freedom. New search for self-identity. Secretive, wants privacy, uncommunicative, resists rules and restriction, slams doors, etc. Argues. More serious and complex. Perspective of personality traits of self and parents. May be depressed and confused. Often a problem year in school, especially boys, may benefit in half day work experience program. Interested in sex.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>16 and 17 Year Olds</u></b> <b><u>Semi-Adult</u></b></p> <p>More self assured, doesn't have to "prove" his independence. Accepts self as is; renews friendly ties with family. More time spent socializing with friends, more emotionally and sexually involved. Job and making money becomes important. Decisions about school, vocational training, jobs, careers.</p>

## 18 tips for living with your adolescent

1. **Learn how and when to let go** -The reason for this adolescent turmoil is to grow up, leave the nest, and become a responsible adult. The teenager's job is to develop a responsible independence. Let your child accomplish this on his own with some guidance from you.

2. **Provide clear guidelines** - Even though teens may outwardly reject parental authority, inwardly they need clear guidelines and expectations. Teenagers respect parents who provide reasonable, fair standards.
3. **Involve your teen in limit-setting** - The best way to do this is to say; "We have a problem with \_\_\_\_\_ what do you think we should do about it?" Be available to talk openly.
4. **Communicate acceptance** - Communication is the key to positive parent-teen relations. Parents do best to listen as well as speak. Allow your teens to share their feelings without judging them. This willingness to share feelings as well as accept differences goes a long way.
5. **Be creative in planning for one-on-one contact with your teen** - Go out for pizza. It's important that you choose neutral ground, not your home where there are dirty dishes, messy rooms, or ringing telephones.
6. **Enter your adolescent's world when possible and appropriate** - Don't dress and act like them, but be aware of today's music, hangouts, language. You don't have to like or accept these things, but accept the fact that your child has made this personal choice.
7. **Get to know your teen's friends** - create a home where your child will want to bring his/her friends into. Have teen-friendly snacks available and welcome your child's friends into your home. This is a good way to get to know them as individuals.
8. **Avoid accepting too much responsibility for your teen's behavior** - Don't offer excuses to his teachers or other people he may have let down. You cannot control your child's behavior 24 hours a day. Let him take responsibility and consequences for his own actions.
9. **Be prepared for dramatic change** - Expect the unexpected. You might as well tell yourself that there will be storms up ahead (maybe tomorrow, may in two years).
10. **Be as flexible as you possibly can** - Wait ten seconds before automatically responding "NO". Have your child give you reasons for his or her requests and privileges. Be flexible with some rules, fair with others, and in-flexible with the rules that are extremely important to you.
11. **Expect to be challenged** - Respond to challenges in a controlled, calm manner. This is a stage your child has to go through. It may help if you treat it as you did the terrible 2's.
12. **Limit unsolicited advice** - Avoid daily negative comments on appearance. Choose your battles carefully - - not everything is worth fighting about.
13. **Lighten up** - Use your sense of humor, be able to laugh at yourself, have fun & enjoy life.
14. **Ask your teen's opinions** - Involve him/her in some family decisions. Teens do have some wonderful ideas and different perspectives on today's life. Solicit their advice.
15. **Be aware of your own stage of adult development** - What are you currently going through with your work, marriage, care of aging parents, death of parents, etc? Parents of teens are often going through a difficult life-stage themselves.
16. **Learn how to really listen** - Pay attention to the tone of your voice or body language. Does the look on your face turn your teen away?
17. **Demonstrate respect with actions and words** - Your children are still watching you. Knock before entering their room, let them know where you are going & when you'll be home.
18. **Stay in touch with your own needs** - This may be the most important piece of information you get today. A happy parent most often raises a happy adolescent.

## **Strategies for Building Your Teen's Self Esteem**

Self-esteem, or the ability to feel good about ourselves, is essential if we are to be happy and successful. Yet maintaining a sense of self-worth becomes difficult for many children when they reach their teens. As a parent, you can play a big role in helping your teen feel good about himself or herself. The following are some ways to help.

Involve your teen in problem-solving and decision-making. Encourage her to express opinions and make suggestions.

Within reason, let your teen make his own decisions. Help him understand the consequences of his decisions and behavior.

Encourage him to take risks and try new experiences, as long as he won't hurt himself or others.

Acknowledge your teen's strengths. Catch her doing something right and praise her.

Recognize your teen's efforts. Help her understand that she's not a failure if she makes mistakes.

Take your teen's worries seriously. Respect his feeling.

If your teen has a problem, help him identify what's bothering him and discuss all the

alternatives. Work with him to come up with a reasonable solution.

Listen without judging. Your teen needs you to understand, accept, and support her. You don't always have to approve of her behavior to be supportive of her. Share your ideas and values without criticizing your teen's.

Give your teen household responsibilities. Express your appreciation for his contribution to the family.

Make mealtime a time for enjoying conversation and sharing ideas. Try not to use this time to bring up problems or complaints.

Choose your battles - -not everything has the same importance. Too much strictness invites rebellion.

It is okay for you and your teen to be angry sometimes. You won't always agree. Resolving the conflict together is an important learning experience.

Don't take yourself too seriously. Share plenty of good times with your teen.

Learn more about your teen's interests, from sports to fashion to art. Show him you respect what's important to him.

Have positive, but reasonable, expectations.

Always show your love - -it's critical to your teen's self-esteem and sense of security.

***For more information, contact  
Diana Converse, M.S., Family Life Educator  
University of Florida Extension, Hills .Co.  
5339 S. County Road 579  
Seffner, FL 33584  
744-5519 ext. 140***