

Chapter 2

Adolescence: It's Normal for Teens to Act Weird

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Adolescence: It's Normal for Teens to Act Weird

I Did It My Way

One would be hard pressed to find a period of growth and development as challenging as the developmental period of adolescence. Life as a two-year-old toddler probably comes the closest, but adolescence is by far and away the number one most disruptive, confusing, frustrating, yet engaging period of life.

Adolescence is a period of time when everything known to be true is challenged, discarded, or modified. All old ideas, beliefs, morals, and values are looked upon with suspicion. Experimentation is the way of life for an adolescent, along with numerous feelings of success and failure. Rules and expectations are both valued and shunned at the same time. Rules are limits and put a curb on experimentation. However, life without rules or expectations would be too scary and overwhelming for any adolescent.

Parents are often worried or confused by changes in their teenagers. The following information should help parents understand this phase of development. Each teenager is an individual with a unique personality and special interests likes and dislikes. However, there are also numerous developmental issues that everyone faces during the adolescent years. The normal feelings and behaviors of the middle school and early high school adolescent and the late high school adolescent are described below.

Middle School and Early High School Adolescence

1. Movement Towards Independence

- Struggle with sense of identify
- Feeling awkward or strange about one's self and one's body
- Focus on self, alternating between high expectations and poor self-concept
- Interests and clothing style influenced by peer group
- Moodiness
- Improved ability to use speech to express one's self
- Realization that parents are not perfect; identification of their faults
- Less overt affection shown to parents, with occasional rudeness
- Complaints that parents interfere with independence
- Tendency to return to childish behavior, particularly when stressed

2. Future Interests and Cognitive Changes

- Mostly interested in present; limited thoughts of future
- Intellectual interests expand and gain in importance
- Greater ability to do work (physical, mental, emotional)

3. Sexuality

- Display shyness, blushing, and modesty
- Girls develop physically sooner than boys
- Increased interest in the opposite sex
- Movement toward heterosexuality with fears of homosexuality
- Concerns regarding physical and sexual attractiveness to others
- Frequently changing relationships
- Worries about being normal

4. Morals, Values and Self-Direction

- Rule and limit testing
- Capacity for abstract thought
- Development of ideals and selection of role models
- More consistent evidence of conscience
- Experimentation with sex and drugs (cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana)

Late High School Adolescence

1. Movement Towards Independence

- Increased independent functioning
- Firmer and more cohesive sense of identity
- Examination of inner experiences
- Ability to think ideas through
- Conflict with parents begins to decrease
- Increased ability for delayed gratification and compromise
- Increased emotional stability
- Increased concern for others
- Increased self-reliance
- Peer relationships remain important and take an appropriate place among other interests

2. Future Interests and Cognitive Changes

- Work habits become more refined
- Increased concern for future
- More importance is placed on one's role in life

3. Sexuality

- Feelings of love and passion
- Development of more serious relationships
- Firmer sense of sexual identity
- Increased capacity for tender and sensual love

4. Morals, Values, and Self-Direction

- Greater capacity for setting goals
- Interest in moral reasoning
- Capacity to use insight
- Increased emphasis on personal dignity and self-esteem
- Social and cultural traditions regain some of their previous importance

Puberty and Adolescence

Puberty is often referred to as the time in life where teens begin the development of adult sexual characteristics: breasts, menstrual periods, public hair, and facial hair. These changes are brought about because the body undergoes an intense biochemical onslaught of hormones. The ovaries and testes begin to pour estrogen and testosterone into the blood stream. Estrogen and progesterone are female sex hormones. Testosterone is the male sex hormone. Sex hormones are steroids which are primarily responsible for the conversion of girls and boys into sexually mature men and women.

At the same time, testosterone-like hormones released by the adrenal glands located near the kidneys begin to circulate. Recent research findings show that these adrenal sex hormones are extremely active in the brain, attaching to receptors everywhere and exerting a direct influence on serotonin and other neurochemicals that regulate moods and excitability.

There is a wide variation in the age at which the physical changes of puberty normally begin. Breast development is usually the first noticeable sign of puberty in girls. This may begin anytime between the ages of 7 and 13 years (as early as 6 in African-American girls). About 15% of girls will develop pubic hair before breast development starts.

The following characteristics describe the sequence of events in girls as they progress through puberty.

- Breasts begin to develop and hips become rounded
- The increase in the rate of growth in height begins
- Pubic hair begins to appear, usually within 6 to 12 months after the start of breast development

- The uterus and vagina, as well as labia and clitoris, increase in size
- Pubic hair is well established and breasts grow further
- The rate of growth in height reaches its peak by about 2 years after puberty began (average age is 12 years)
- Menstruation begins, almost always after the peak growth rate in height has been reached (average age is 12.5 years)

Once girls start to menstruate, they usually grow about 1 or 2 more inches, reaching their final adult height by about age 14 or 15 years (younger or older depending on when puberty began).

Boys tend to show the first physical changes of puberty between the ages of 10 and 16 years. They tend to grow most quickly between ages 12 and 15. The growth spurt of boys is, on an average, about 2 years later than that of girls. By age 16, most boys have stopped growing, but their muscles will continue to develop. Other features of puberty in boys include:

- The penis and testicles increase in size
- Pubic hair appears, followed by underarm and facial hair
- Voice deepens and may sometimes crack or break
- Adam's apple, or larynx cartilage, gets bigger
- Testicles begin to produce sperm

Adolescence is a developmental period of emotional changes. Teens become more aware of how others see them, especially their peers. They are beginning to become more independent and separate from Mom and Dad.

Adolescence begins in some children around the age of 10 to 11. While some teens may be late bloomers, that is the onset of puberty happens later, the onset of adolescence may be in full bloom.

Teen Brains and Behavior

Not long ago, people believed that the human brain quit developing by the time a child was between 6 to 7 years old. Because our brain is about 95% of its adult size around 7 years of age, people naturally thought that size equaled content.

Brand new research has proven that there is a second period of rapid brain development around 11 years of age for girls and 12 to 13 years of age for boys that lasts until the early 20's. *Teen brains are undergoing more changes and reshaping during this time than any other time except just after birth.* The biggest changes are

occurring in the prefrontal cortex, which is located just behind the forehead. This part of the brain is responsible for the ability to use logic, make sound decisions and size up potential risks. And because it's still under construction that explains why teens sometimes show good judgment and sometimes let their emotions take over and make really dumb choices.

For example: Teens know not to drink and drive. But sometimes when they're with their friends, they don't want to be called chicken, so their brain goes on vacation and their emotions take over. The part of the brain that controls immediate or gut reactions is getting more playing time than the part that controls logic, even though teens know they'll probably get in trouble.

But, the good news is that by about the age of 16 to 17, teens not only survive but flourish! In spite of all these changes, it's estimated that about 80% of teens grow into happy and healthy adults that live productive lives.



Helping Teens Through Challenging Times

The following is a list of nurturing strategies that can help you and your teen through these challenging times:

1. **Spend time together.** Do things together: evening dinner, vacations, homework, worship services, holidays. Know what your teen likes to do and do it together.
2. **Be there as a healthy and supportive model.** Parents' presence makes a difference. Be a "hands on" parent your teen can rely on.

3. **Encourage after school activities.** Research shows that active teens in supervised after school activities are less likely to use drugs, get into trouble with the law, and become teen parents. Involvement in school or community sports programs, clubs or service organizations as well as volunteer work have long-term positive social benefits.
4. **Discuss the issues of drugs and sex.** Research clearly indicates that parent-teen discussions have a positive influence on helping teens make good choices.
5. **Encourage after-school jobs.** Studies show that teens that hold part-time jobs after school improve their self-confidence, develop good stress management skills, and experience positive social bonds.
6. **Insist on healthy lifestyle choices.** Proper nutrition and the proper amount of sleep are critical for teens to learn and succeed in school. The average teen needs around 9 hours of sleep a night although many average less than 7 hours a night.
7. And finally, **listen more and talk less.** Encourage discussions. Ask questions. Show genuine interest in your teen's day. Be attentive. Listen with your heart as well as your ears.

A developmental period of life where physical, emotional, social and neurological changes are ongoing produces high levels of instability and anxiety. Parents who are the primary source of support, understanding and stability help teens try to make sense of their world. Be the parent to your teen that you would like raising you.

Praising Teenagers and Their Behavior

What is Praise?

Praise can be a compliment, gesture, facial expression, or form of gentle touch like hugs or high-fives that promote feelings of self-pride, worth and accomplishment in others. In praising teens, parents are point out the value of their personal traits and characteristics, as well as their abilities, efforts and achievements.

Why are Praising Teens and Their Behavior so Important?

1. When teens receive praise, they learn that who they are and the things they do are pleasing to parents.

2. Teens who are praised for their behavior, or for their personal qualities develop a personal sense of self-worth.
3. Praise is like fuel that powers the positive self-worth of teens. Teens who sincerely believe they have worth treat themselves and others in positive ways.
4. Years of research have indicated that teens with positive self-worth get better grades, are more popular in school, don't get discouraged easily, and generally live more productive lives.

Two Types of Praise: Praise for Being and Praise for Doing

There are two types of ways to use praise as a parenting practice. One way is called "Praise for Being" and the other way is called "Praise for Doing."

Praise for Being is the highest form of praise a teen, or anyone else for that matter, can receive. It tells teens that just because they are your son or daughter, they have value and worth. Praise for Being lets teens know you value them for just who they are. It is unconditional and given freely at any time.

Some **Praise for Being** statements are:

- "I really love you!"*
- "You're a kind person."*
- "What a special person you are."*
- "I'm so happy you are my son."*
- "You're a wonderful daughter."*

Praise for Being praises a teen for whom he or she is.

People like to know they are appreciated for their efforts and accomplishments. Teenagers are no different. When they hear Praise for Doing something they know they've pleased mom and dad. Praising a teenager's behavior can be for something they tried and completed, or tried but didn't quite succeed or finish. As parents, if you acknowledge your teen's efforts, they are more likely to try again.

Some **Praise for Doing** statements are:

- "Good job cleaning your room!"*
- "I'm really pleased to see you try so hard."*
- "Thanks for cooperating."*
- "Thanks for walking the dog."*
- "I appreciate your help."*

Praise for Doing lets teens know you appreciate and value their efforts and behavior.

Using Praise Correctly

Many parents unknowingly use praise incorrectly by using "Praise for Being" and "Praise for Doing" together. An example of such statements are:

"What a nice job cleaning your room! I really love you when you cooperate with me."

Such statements indicate to teens that you only love or appreciate them when they do something that pleases you. That's known as "conditional love" – love that has to be earned. Teenagers quickly learn to resent such love because they know if they don't do something, their parents won't love them.

Promote Self-Praise

Self-praise is a way others in your family can learn the habit of praising themselves and boosting their self-image. To help a teenager learn self-praise, parents need to describe how good the act must have made the teenager feel. Imagine yourself in the shoes of your teen and describe the feeling:

"I bet getting all C's and B's on your report card really feels like an accomplishment."

"You have a lot to be proud of the way you..."

Promoting self-praise encourages others to feel good about who they are and what they do. It's important for maintaining a positive self-regard.



Modeling Self-Praise

The best way to help others in your family learn to praise themselves is by modeling self-praise. Praising yourself in the presence of others tells them you think highly of

yourself. You need not overdo it; just simply praise yourself for being or doing.

*"I'm proud that I controlled my temper in the traffic jam."
"Boy, I look good today!"*

Go ahead. Toot your own horn! You deserve it.

How to Praise

1. **Focus your attention on the person and the situation.** Praise deserves your undivided attention.
2. **Move close to the person.** It feels good to be praised by someone close to you.
3. **Make eye contact.** If you're praising a child, get down on the child's level. For instance, stoop down to make contact with a young child – this makes it all the more special.
4. **Look pleasant.** Everyone likes to see a happy face.
5. **Touch the person in a gentle way.** Perhaps hold the person's hand. It's nice to be touched while being praised.
6. **Describe what you see.** *"You did a great job doing the dishes."* Share your pleasure, "I appreciate your efforts," or *"I love you."*
7. **Praise ANYTIME!** There is no such thing as too much praise.

Praise for Being and Praise for Doing are the two most effective ways of building positive self-esteem and self-concept.

Being "Conceited"

Some parents worry about their children growing up being conceited because they receive praise for the people they are or the things they do. Conceit is different from self-worth. When teens feel conceited, they are usually sending the message that "I'm better than you." Contrary to belief, it's teenagers (or adults) who don't have a positive self-image that act conceited. In this sense, conceit is their effort to elevate their self-worth at the expense of others.

Session 2

Home Practice Assignment

1. During Family Home Nurturing Time:
 - a. Practice the techniques of Praise for Being and Praise for Doing. Have each family member say one Praise for Being and one Praise for Doing to each other. Use the day's events as a basis for the praise statements. Make a commitment as a family to recognize the good in others.
 - b. Discuss the family's involvement in the program so far. Ask the question, "How is it going?"
2. End the discussion with a family hug. Let everyone make physical contact in a way that is safe.
3. During the week:
 - a. Practice praising other family's members for being and doing.
 - b. Practice praising yourself twice each day: once for being and once for doing.
 - c. Read the information located in **Chapter 2** in your **Handbook**. (Parents read Chapter 2 in the Parent Handbook; Teens read Chapter 2 in the Adolescent Handbook).

NOTES: