

THE CHILDREN'S CLINIC, P.C.

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The Pre and Young Teen 11-13 Years Old

The Age of Rapid Changes

Early adolescence, or pre-adolescence, is a period filled with changes. Most obvious is the beginning of the physical changes of puberty and the need to be more independent. It can be a rough time for the adolescent as well as for parents and family. It is a time of transition.

Development

Physical changes: With puberty, changes are rapid and dramatic. Until this time, most physical changes have been in height and weight. For most girls, breast budding is the first physical sign of puberty, usually around 9 – 11 years old. Next is a rapid growth in height. About 6 months before menstruation or periods begin, girls may have discharge from their vagina which is mucousy and white. Menstruation begins at an average of 12 years of age, but 9-16 years of age is completely normal. Once menstruation has started, girls may continue to grow taller for a couple of years.

For most boys, testicular growth is the first physical sign of puberty which usually occurs around 11-12 years of age (9-14 is normal). Also around this time boys may have “wet dreams” or nocturnal emissions, which is a normal part of puberty. The major growth spurt in boys is around 14 years of age, which is usually later than most girls.

On average, physical changes that occur during puberty are complete in four years for girls and three years for boys. This is a lot of change in a short period of time. These changes do not happen for all teens at the same time or rate. The young teen is well aware that not only is he/she changing, but so are friends. Whether they easily admit it or not, ***all adolescents are concerned about their bodily changes***. Giving correct information in a straightforward and sensitive manner helps the teen accept these changes and build positive self-esteem.

Social changes: During adolescence, teens have a need to separate from their families and form their own personal style and sense of self. As they separate from family, their friends and peers become very important. In some families this happens rather easily although some find this period of growing up very difficult. As adolescents try to become more independent, many parents want to maintain control and influence in an effort to protect their teen. It is a time which can seem like the “terrible two’s” all over again, but teenage rebellion is normal. Comparing values against friends, family and media; raising questions about parents’ beliefs; and questioning household rules are important tasks because they teach teens how to be independent and self-supporting adults.

Tips for Parents

- Continue to listen to your teen, even when you're on different sides of the fence.
- Avoid constant criticism, no matter how much your teenager's behavior or appearance annoys you. Pick your battles and let the little things go. As for the bigger issues, let your teen know that although you disagree, you respect his right to hold a different opinion.
- Preaching and nagging do not work. Discuss your beliefs and then teach by example.
- Take an interest in what your teen is doing. Spend time with your teen.
- Discuss with your teen TV programs and movies that they are watching.
- Respect your teen's right and need for privacy.
- Decide with your teen when they can do things on their own, like staying home alone.
- Discuss family rules and what happens when those rules are broken. Set clear limits and be consistent.
- Begin helping your teen take more responsibility for his/her own medical care, including talking with their health care provider.
- Above all, love your teen. Look for ways to honestly give compliments and praise their accomplishments.

Food for Thought

It is important for teens and their families to plan ahead on how to respond to situations that may be unsafe or difficult. Listed are a few situations for your teen to think about and then discuss with you. You can probably think of other situations which may impact your teen.

- You go on a camping trip with your family and you forgot to pack your bike helmet. Everyone is ready to go. Do you ride your bike anyway?
- Your best friend at school asks if she can copy your homework because she forgot to do hers. Do you let her copy your work? How do you handle it?
- You're at the mall with your friends and someone brings a pack of cigarettes. Everyone is trying one. What would you do? How might you get out of this situation?
- You are concerned because some kids at a party secretly brought in some beer. What do you do?
- You are at your friend's house for a sleep over. In the middle of the night when your friend's parents are in bed, he brings out his dad's gun to show you. Are you concerned? What might you worry about? How might you change the situation?
- During a party some of your friends have gone upstairs to be alone with their boyfriends. A boy you like has asked if you want to go be alone with him. What do you say?

Readings for Parents of Adolescents

Get Out of My Life, But First Would You Drive Me and Cheryl to the Mall?, by Anthony E. Wolf, Noonday Press (1991).

This book does a good job describing adolescent development and why adolescents behave like they do. It then provides chapters on specific topics such as conflict, divorce, sex, drinking, and suicide. Written in a conversational manner.

Grounded For Life: Stop Blowing Your Fuse and Start Communicating With Your Teenager, by Louise Felton Tracy, Parenting Press, Inc. (1994).

Grounded for Life?! looks at the way parenting has been working and suggests a better way. It offers parents a child-rearing process that builds on communication, cooperative problem-solving, and individual strengths.

Growing Up Again: Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children, by Jean Illsley Clarke & Connie Dawson, Hazelton/HarperCollins (1989).

A most helpful book for parents who didn't receive effective parenting as they were growing up.

How To Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk, by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish, Avon Book (1980).

This book helps children and parents deal with their feelings. It focuses on engaging cooperation and encouraging autonomy as alternatives to punishment. This is a general book about parent/child communication, not adolescents in particular.

Pick Up Your Socks...and other skills growing children need!, by Elizabeth Crary, Parenting Press (1990).

Absolutely crammed with good ideas and explanations on how to incorporate positive parenting into everyday family situations.

Surviving Your Adolescent, by Thomas W. Phelan, Child Management, Inc. (1991).

Written in an upbeat, entertaining tone, this book might be viewed as somewhat simplistic. However, it contains many basic points that bear reviewing.

The Parent Guide – STEP/TEEN. Systemic Parenting of Teens, by Lon Kinkmeyer & Gary K. McKay, American Guidance Service (1983).

This book is the teen version of the popular STEP program. It begins by helping parents understand teens' emotional development and then focuses on communication and discipline in approaching the adolescent.

The Teenage Body Book, by Kathy McCoy & Charles Wibbelsman, Pocket Books (1984).

Comprehensive and helpful information for teenagers and parents.

You and Your Adolescent, by Laurence Steinberg & Ann Levine, Harper Perennial (1990).

A well-researched, all-encompassing manual for parents. Good, succinct advice about problems; list of resources.