

PETERKORT

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THE CHILDREN'S CLINIC, P.C.

**The Adolescent
14 – 18 years old**

TUALATIN

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“Who am I”

By the age of 15, teens have completed most of the physical changes of puberty. For most teens, the major question asked is: “Who am I?”

Development

As teens sort out their values and beliefs, friends become very important, so they tend to spend less time with family. The teen is very aware how their friends and peers dress, talk, wear their hair, etc. Peer influence is very strong and may take over the teen’s own sense of right and wrong. Risk-taking behaviors increase, and include experimenting with drugs, smoking, reckless driving, and sex. In addition, the ability for teens to see the consequences of their decisions is limited. They are often not able to understand how actions today will affect their lives in the future, thereby increasing their risk-taking behaviors.

As adolescents try to be more independent, they test rules and question authority. For many adolescents, frequent conflict and disagreement at home is quite common. This is normal as teenagers are growing into adults who are developing their own values, beliefs, and morals.

Maintaining Communication

Although adolescence may be a tough time for families, open lines of communication are important to maintain family well-being. Even though it may be hard to feel loving when your teen is being testy or ill-natured, he is still your child and someone you love and admire a great deal. Most adolescents love and respect their parents in spite of disagreements about everyday things.

Here are some communication guidelines, which may help when talking with your teenager:

- In an effort to understand your teenager’s point of view, ask questions and try to see why they feel the way they do. In return, ask her to be patient as you express your own thoughts.
- Choose your words carefully so you’re not misunderstood. Teenagers will search for all possible “loopholes” in your rules. They are not bad for doing so, but it does require that you become quite exact in what you tell them. If you want your daughter home from her after-school meeting by five o’clock, you’re better off with a specific message such as “Be home by five” than with a more general “Make sure you’re home before dark.” The first message is much less confusing. Also, have a good reason why you’ve chosen five o’clock and explain it to her.
- Find as many situations as possible in which you can give praise and support to your teenager. Make sure they know you take pride in their school achievements and extra curricular activities. Let them know you love them for who they are. Even during their most rebellious moments teenagers usually worry about disappointing their parents or making them angry. All of this is tied to their fear of losing their parents’ love. As a result, they do much of their natural experimenting in secret so as not to upset their family members who have always been there for them.

- Speak to your teenager with respect-as someone whose opinions you value.
- Be aware of your tone of voice and the communication style you're using. Sometimes these can send a more powerful message than the words you use.
- Don't pretend you know all the answers. When you're wrong, admit it. Don't be afraid to apologize if you make a mistake. You won't lose your position as a parent and an authority figure by doing so.
- Set fair rules and limits, and be consistent in enforcing them.

Food for Thought

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

- Your boyfriend/girlfriend forgot to do their homework and now wants to borrow yours. What would you do? How might you respond?
- Your parents are out of town and your boyfriend/girlfriend wants to come over for the evening. Do you invite them over? How might you respond?
- You get a ride to a party only to find at the end of the night your driver has been drinking or used drugs. Do you call your parents, get another ride, or cross your fingers and hope you get home O.K.?
- You have been drinking or used drugs at a party, and now you need to get home. What do you do – drive anyway, take a taxi, call your parents, hitchhike?
- Your friend just got a motorcycle for his birthday and wants to take you for a ride, but doesn't have another helmet. Do you go just for a "quick" ride? How do you respond?
- Your boyfriend/girlfriend is really pushing you to have sex with him/her. How might you respond? Who could you talk to? Have you discussed birth control or sexually transmitted disease prevention? Could your parents help in any way?

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 Listen & Listen so Kids Will Talk, by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish, Avon Book (1980)

This book help 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. Phelas, 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 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 & 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.

