

Positive Parenting Tips for Healthy Child Development

Early Adolescence (12 - 14 years old)

Developmental Milestones

Early adolescence is a time of many physical, mental, emotional, and social changes. Hormones change as puberty begins. Boys grow facial and pubic hair and their voices deepen. Girls grow pubic hair and breasts, and start menstruating. They might be worried about these changes and how they are looked at by others. This will also be a time when your teenager might face peer pressure to use alcohol, tobacco products, and drugs, and to have sex. Other challenges can be eating disorders, depression, and family problems.

At this age, teens make more of their own choices about friends, sports, studying, and school. They become more independent, with their own personality and interests. Some changes younger teens go through are:



Emotional/Social Changes

- More concern about body image, looks, and clothes.
- Focus on self, going back and forth between high expectations and lack of confidence.
- Moodiness
- More interest in and influence by peer group.
- Less affection shown toward parents. May sometimes seem rude or short-tempered.
- Anxiety from more challenging school work.
- Eating problems sometimes start at this age. For information on healthy eating and exercise for children and teenagers, visit http://kidshealth.org/teen/food_fitness/.

Mental/Cognitive Changes

- More ability for complex thought.
- Better able to express feelings through talking.
- A stronger sense of right and wrong.
- Many teens sometimes feel sad or depressed. Depression can lead to poor grades at school, alcohol or drug use, unsafe sex, and other problems. For more information on adolescent mental health, visit <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/healthinformation/depchildmenu.cfm>.

(Adapted with permission from Bright Futures: Green M, Palfrey JS, editors. Bright Futures Family Tip Sheets: Early Adolescence. Arlington (VA): National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health, 2001. Other sources: American Academy of Child and Family Psychiatry and the American Academy of Pediatrics)

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Trust is important for teenagers. Even as she develops independence, she will need to know she has your support. At the same time, she will need you to respect her need for privacy.

- Be honest and direct with your teenager when talking about sensitive subjects such as drugs, drinking, smoking, and sex.
- Encourage your teenager to get exercise. He or she might join a team or take up an individual sport. Helping with household tasks such as mowing the lawn, walking the dog, or washing the car also keeps your teen active.
- Meal time is very important for families. Eating together helps teenagers make better choices about the foods they eat, promotes healthy weight, and gives your family time to talk to each other.
- Meet and get to know your teenager's friends.
- Show an interest in your teenager's school life.
- Help your teenager make healthy choices while encouraging him to make his own decisions.
- Respect your teenager's opinions and take into account her thoughts and feelings. It is important that she knows you are listening to her.

Safety First

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among 12 to 14 year olds. Injuries from sports and other activities are also common.

- Make sure your teenager knows about the importance of wearing seatbelts. Visit the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for more information.
- Encourage your teenager to wear a helmet when riding a bike, motorcycle, or all-terrain vehicle.
- Talk with your teenager about the dangers of drugs, drinking, smoking, and risky sexual activity. Ask him what he knows and thinks about these issues, and share your thoughts and feelings with him. Listen to what she says and answer her questions honestly and directly.
- Talk with your teenager about the importance of having friends who are interested in positive activities. Encourage him to avoid peers who pressure him to make unhealthy choices.
- Know where your teenager is and whether an adult is present. Make plans with her for when she will call you, where you can find her, and what time you expect her home.
- Set clear rules for your teenager when he is home alone. Talk about such issues as having friends at the house; how to handle unsafe situations (emergencies, fire, drugs, sex, etc.) and homework or household tasks to complete.

A pdf of this document for reprinting is available free of charge from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/child/earlyadolescence.htm>

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