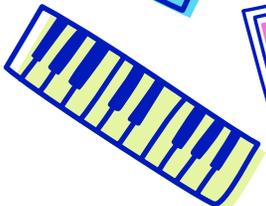


ADOLESCENCE



ADOLESCENCE

Section 1: Overview

Adolescence is a complex time. Adolescents become more involved with the world, their bodies change and they can face challenges involving behavior and emotional health.

Sometimes, adults treat adolescents as if they are still children, especially when they don't understand adolescent behaviors. However, most problems and misunderstandings bring unique opportunities to teach, listen, bond and grow. Understanding adolescent development helps adults to communicate with patience, and offer effective support and encouragement.

Section 2: Understanding

Understanding this time of development can help adults to communicate with patience and offer effective support and encouragement to teens.

Adolescents need encouragement and understanding to develop confidence and self-esteem, a positive view of their bodies and their world. This requires healthy physical, social and emotional development.

By keeping adolescent development and needs in mind, adults can provide the patience, support and understanding that adolescents need as their brains and bodies develop.



DEVELOPMENT



There are 5 areas of development in adolescents:

- Physical
- Emotional
- Social
- Cognitive
- Moral



There are several key ways to support adolescents through proper and healthy growth of the 5 areas:

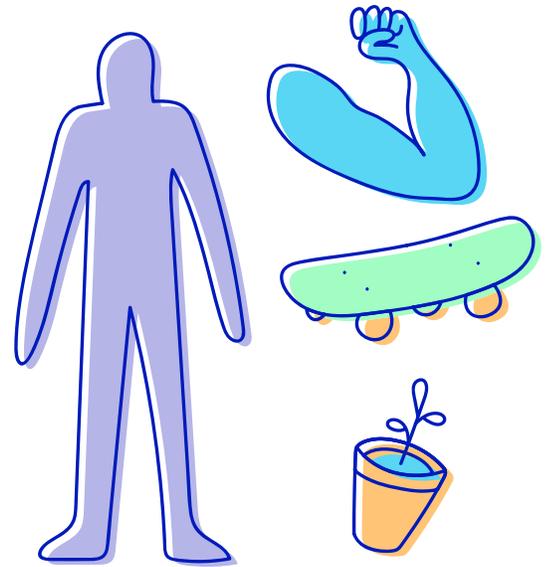
- Healthy Habits
- Sleep
- Nutrition
- Limited screen time
- Relationships
- Safety and Safe choices
- Positive Support

Section 3: Physical Development

Puberty is when one's body begins to develop and change as they move from kid to adult. During puberty, the body grows quickly which brings many changes, demands and adjustments. Some adolescents reach physical maturity sooner, others later. These differences can be hard.

BASIC HEALTH MANAGEMENT

Establishing healthy habits during puberty help build health and success for tomorrow and for a lifetime.



Sleep

Sleep helps adolescents grow and strengthen their bodies and perform well. Teens need 8-10 hours of sleep each night. Keeping a consistent sleep schedule, limiting screen time (e.g., cell phone, computer), and no caffeine after dinner are great ways to encourage good sleeping habits.



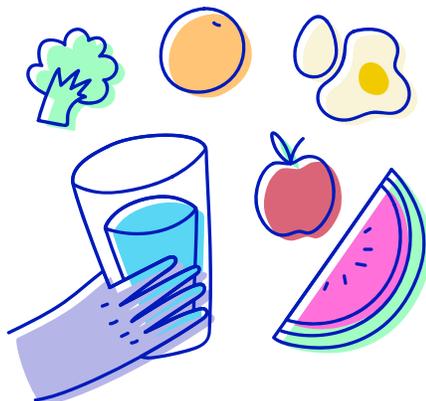
Exercise

Parents and caring adults can model physical activity. Go on walks, bike rides or toss around a ball with your teens. This is also a great opportunity to spend time together with your adolescent.



Nutrition

When going through puberty, nutrition becomes even more vital. Adolescents will have more nutritional needs for calories, protein, iron, calcium, zinc, folate, and more. They may often begin to eat more to compensate for the energy their body uses to grow.



SAFETY FIRST

While growing and developing. It is very important to protect one's body and brain:

- Wear a helmet when participating in sports. This includes outdoor activities such as biking, skating, skiing, or rock-climbing. Concussions and other brain injuries are very serious.
- Wear your seatbelt in the car, even for short distances. Seatbelts may not seem that important, but they do save lives.

UNIQUE ISSUES IN PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

The concern for body image can be extreme and when combined with other warning signs may indicate an eating disorder. Eating disorders is a mental disorder that involves the way people eat and how they view food. These disorders can be a danger one's body, mental health, and relationships. Common types of eating disorders are anorexia, bulimia, binge eating, and avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID).

There's no single cause for eating disorders. Genes, environment, and stressful events all play a role. These disorders can come from practices and beliefs that they have at the beginning of adolescence.

Keeping an open communication with adolescents can help with recognizing symptoms of eating disorders for an earlier intervention.



Anorexia

Anorexia nervosa involves having a distorted body image and under-eating to maintain an unhealthy low weight. This can affect teen girls or boys.

- eat very little on purpose
- have an intense fear of weight gain
- have a distorted body image



ARFID

ARFID (avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder) involves eating very little food or avoiding certain foods for a range of reasons, such as concerns about food texture or not feeling well when eating.

- are not interested in food or avoid foods
- lose weight, or don't gain expected amount of weight
- are not afraid of gaining weight
- don't have a poor body image

Bulimia

Bulimia nervosa involves binge eating followed by inappropriate compensation through purging.

- recurring overeat and feel out of control to stop, called binge eating
- do things to make up for overeating, called purging. They may use laxatives, diuretics, weight loss pills, fast, or exercise a lot.
- judge themselves based on body shape and weight

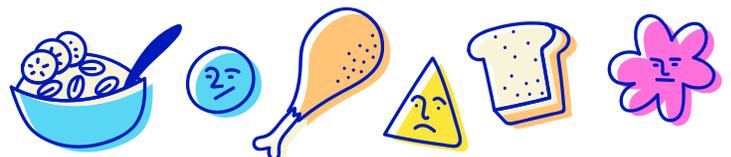
Binge eating

Binge eating disorder involves repeated episodes of eating a larger than usual amount of food in a limited time and feeling psychological distress as a result. *It is not the same as simply overeating.*

- recurring overeat and feel out of control to stop, called binge eating
- eat large amounts even when they are not hungry
- feel upset or guilty after binge eating
- often gain weight and may become very overweight



If you feel that an adolescent is developing an eating disorder, it is imperative to consult with a medical professional on how to aid them on their journey to heal.



Section 4: Emotional Development

Healthy emotional development is marked by a gradually increasing ability to perceive, assess, and manage emotions. This is a biological process driven by physical and cognitive changes and heavily influenced by context and environment. The process of emotional development gives adolescents the opportunity to build skills, discover unique qualities, and develop strengths for optimal health.



Factors that affect how well adolescents navigate this process include:

Self-management

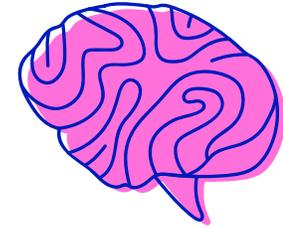
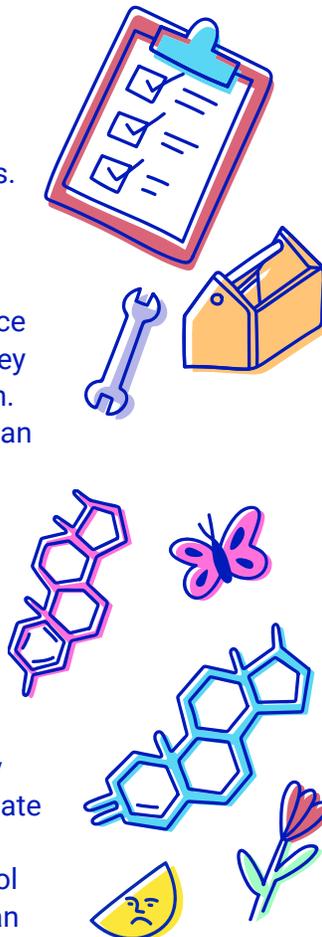
By learning how to manage their emotions, teens can establish positive goals and gain foresight into the influence of their emotions.

To improve emotional management, adolescents should first learn to recognize and describe strong, complex emotions. Once adolescents can recognize how they feel, they can choose how they will react to a situation. They will also learn to avoid problems that can cause strong emotions.

Hormones

Hormones are critical chemicals in the brain that bring about physical changes, affect moods, and can heighten emotional responses.

As a result, teens are more easily swayed by emotion and have difficulty making appropriate decisions. It can also be a time of rapid and stressful change in peer relationships, school expectations, and family dynamics which can further heighten emotional moods.



DID YOU KNOW?

The brain's frontal lobe— which is responsible for reasoning, planning, and problemsolving as well as emotions— doesn't fully develop until the mid-twenties. This is why adolescents may find it difficult to manage their emotions and think through the consequences of their actions.



Physical changes in adolescents' brain and body chemistry help increase the capacity for emotional awareness, self-management, and empathy.



Section 5: Unique Issues

Self Esteem

Providing support and understanding to your teen can help improve their confidence.

- How adolescents feel about themselves can affect their sense of self-worth and how they act in their environment.

Identity Formation

The path to identity formation can be challenging, it can motivate adolescents to learn about themselves and it is a critical time to show support to your teen and their interests.

- As teens begin to achieve independence, they start to define their passions, values, talents, definitions of success, and even relationships.
- Adolescents can often experiment with different ideas, friends, and activities.

Stress

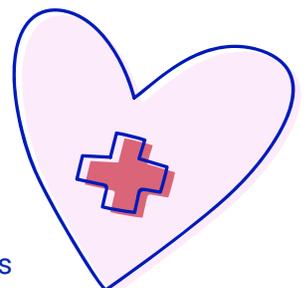
A strong support system can help protect adolescents from long-lasting negative effects and create an environment that enables them to overcome and thrive.

- Adolescents live in a variety of environments and experience a wide range of stressors that affect emotional development.
- Learning healthy responses to stressful situations is part of normal development.

Trauma

If an adolescent has experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, then it is important to seek guidance from a professional who is adept at guiding and aiding them through their time of healing. These extreme forms of stress can weaken the immune system, resulting in chronic physical health problems and potentially leading to depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders.

- Some adolescents face traumatic events such as experiencing or witnessing physical or sexual abuse or school violence.
- Events can be long or short term and some adolescents can experience multiple types of traumatic stress.
- Toxic stress also can lead to stress-related diseases and cognitive impairment and can experience *post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)*, a condition in which a person relives a traumatic event through persistent memories or flashbacks and experiences other symptoms such as insomnia or angry outbursts.



SUPPORTING EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Here are some ways you can help facilitate emotional development:

Strengthen communication skills

Effective and open communication lies at the heart of a strong parent-adolescent relationship. Be an attentive listener, share your experiences instead of lectures, and ask open-ended questions.



Build emotional vocabulary

State your feelings and discuss how other people may feel in a nonjudgmental way. Point out nonverbal cues such as body language when discussing emotions.



Ask your teen, "How did you feel about that?" and "How do you think that made the other person feel?"

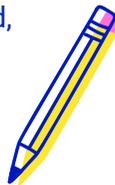
Promote stress management skills

Encourage adolescents to handle stress in healthy ways. Daily management strategies include getting adequate sleep, staying active with exercise and hobbies, practicing deep breathing, and eating regular meals.



Nurture self-regulation skills

Provide opportunities for adolescents to understand, express, and moderate their feelings and behaviors. Model your own selfregulation, create a warm environment, establish fair consequences for poor decisions, and reduce the intensity of conflicts.



Help teens think carefully about risky situations

Prepare adolescents for risky situations by talking about what they can do to anticipate and avoid them. After a risky event, keep your judgment away. This creates an environment for open discussion and self-reflection. Give them time to think, it can take some time to process the experience fully.



Ask your teen, "Why do you think this happened?" and "What could you do differently next time?"

SET A GOOD EXAMPLE



Modeling healthy behaviors can help support positive emotional development and help youth thrive.

- **Focus on your emotional well-being.** Join a parent group where you can navigate your feelings with people who understand your point of view.
- **Practice healthy goal-setting.** Let go of perfection for adolescents and yourself. Break goals into smaller tasks that are easier to manage. If you face an obstacle, focus on what you can control, and let go of the things that you can't.
- **Value every adolescent's unique identity.** Even when you don't relate to their feelings or experiences, your understanding, acceptance, and respect as a adult goes far.
- **Resolve conflicts with respect for others.** When you disagree with someone, focus on the resolution instead of assigning blame. Take time to cool off and think things through when you feel overwhelmed.
- **Manage your anger.** Practice relaxation exercises. Seek professional help if you are unsure of what to do.

Section 6: Cognitive Development

Brain Growth

Brains in adolescence undergo a lot of growth and development. These changes strengthen their ability to problem solve, plan, and make decisions.

As fast as these changes happen, they also take time and patient guidance to learn, change, and establish a pattern of healthy habits for a lifetime!

Understanding the Brain

It can be hard to understand why adolescents may be forgetful, impulsive, irrational, or take risks. Adolescents behave, solve problems, and make decisions differently than adults, because of their changing brains continue to mature and develop.



Based on the stage of their brain development, It is easy for adolescents to:

- misread or misinterpret social cues and emotions
- get into accidents or fights
- engage in dangerous or risky behavior
- struggle with responsibility and organization



These brain differences don't mean that adolescents can't make good decisions or tell the difference between right and wrong. It also doesn't mean that they shouldn't be held responsible. However, knowing these differences can help adults understand and anticipate adolescent behavior.



Adolescents need encouragement to develop self-confidence, and a positive view of their bodies and their world. This requires healthy physical, social and emotional development. By keeping adolescent development and needs in mind, adults can provide the patience, support and understanding that adolescents need as their brains and bodies develop.



“The teen’s brain is wired for learning.”
- Frances Jensen, M.D.

Seek out opportunities for teens to engage as learners. A great way for adolescents to learn and improve their cognitive abilities is for them to look for opportunities to practice their skills in leadership roles.

Adolescents can find learning and leadership activities that help them develop foresight, vision, and planning skills through their schools, extracurricular activities, communities, or at home. Parents and other caring adults can suggest different activities and facilitate adolescents' participation such as by helping them find a way to get to and from a club.



UNIQUE ISSUES

Trauma

Being aware of trauma and its potential impact, whether in early childhood or in adolescence, and helping adolescents cope, can go a long way in improving young people's well-being.

- Experiencing violence, neglect, highly stressful events or abuse can impact brain growth.



Mental Health Disorders

Many mental health disorders first appear during adolescence, in part because of changes in physical brain development.

- An adolescent struggling with mental health challenges may have decreased motivation and have a harder time with tasks such as problem-solving, planning and decision-making.



Substance Use

- Exposure to drugs and alcohol during the teen years can alter or delay brain development.
- The brain is especially vulnerable to addiction at this stage of life. Use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs in the teen years is associated with increased risk for adult substance use disorders.



Risk Taking

One of the biggest challenges in adolescence is an increase in risk-taking. Taking a risk to try new things can bring opportunities that will help them make the transition to their independent adult lives, such as finding a career, starting their own family, or moving to new places.

- As adolescent brains develop, the ability to reason and think through consequences takes a leap forward. Sometimes, they are able to calculate risk, but don't always make the best decisions because other factors, like emotions or social pressure and rewards, come into play.
- Adults can help protect adolescents from unhealthy risks by being aware of these factors and creating environments and opportunities that guide young people to healthy choices.



LEARNING DISABILITIES

It is important to support adolescents with learning disabilities. If parents think an adolescent is struggling academically, they should make sure the adolescent is screened.



Common Learning Disabilities:

- Dyslexia
- ADHD
- Dyscalculia
- Dysgraphia

The earlier a professional can diagnose a learning disability, the sooner the young person can receive assistance.

Furthermore, adults can work with schools and healthcare providers to make sure students with learning disabilities have the skills and support they need for success.

UNIQUE ISSUES

Rate of Physical Development

Adolescents' bodies change and develop at different rates, and these processes do not always happen at the same time.

- Faster physical development can mean being seen and treated more like adults which can expose them to situations they may not be emotionally and cognitively ready to handle.
- Slower physical developments can mean being seen and treated more like young children which can lead to frustration and a feeling of worthlessness.



Evolving Friend Groups

Acceptance by a peer group is crucial to adolescents.

- Seeking acceptance might spur them to change the way they act to make them feel they belong to the group.
- Younger adolescents may surround themselves with those who are similar.
- Older adolescents may branch out to other groups diversifying social circles.



Online and In Person Interaction

- Social media carries both potential risks and potential benefits for adolescents. Technology can help adolescents stay connected to each other, and express who they are to the world.
- Unfortunately, technology and social media have also provided a new forum for harassment. Be open with your teen so that if they feel vulnerable from online harassment you can provide the support they need.



PEER PRESSURE



Peer pressure can sometimes get a bad reputation, but peer pressure can be bad or good. Let's explain.

Bad Peer Pressure

Some peer pressure can influence teens to engage in risky behaviors, which some adolescents think will earn them greater acceptance among their peers. This type of peer pressure can cause teens to engage in activities that they know are wrong and may even not want to do.

Good Peer Pressure

Some peer pressure can be beneficial and positive peer groups practice behaviors such as cooperating, sharing, resolving conflicts, and supporting others. Positive peer groups can help adolescents build relationship skills, hold favorable views of themselves, and have the confidence to take positive risks.

SUPPORTING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Set Examples Of Healthy Relationships

Building strong, healthy, positive relationships can help set a good example of what an adolescent should expect from their relationships.

Treat each other with respect, give each other space, talk through problems, and communicate honestly.

Acknowledge that friends and romantic partners can remain close and intimate even if they say “no” to each other.

Get to Know Friends and Dating Partners

Take the time to learn more about the people they surround themselves with. Ask openly about what they do for fun and what hobbies they enjoy.

Encourage Participation In Activities

Help adolescents make friends by getting them involved in activities that match their interests.

Exhibit Empathetic Behavior

Act on concern for others, use statements that describe how others feel, and talk about being compassionate. Adults and adolescents also can work together on community service projects.

Build Connections by Discussing Interests

Take the time to learn about your adolescent’s hobbies and interests and expose them to new activities to help you find mutual interests and have more meaningful interactions. You may even find that your teen can teach you a new hobby!

Teach Adolescents How To Deal With Peer Pressure

Help adolescents understand peer pressure and how to recognize peer pressure. Tell them it’s okay to say “no” if they feel uncomfortable in a situation.

Set Online and Screen-Time Limits

Social media can be a risk and a tool for social health. This largely depends on how adolescents use the media and how parents talk with teens about online safety.

Talk to adolescents about behaving responsibly online, both how they treat others and how they can keep themselves safe. It is easy to become addicted and dependant on the internet and screened devices.



Section 7: Moral Development

Adolescence is a time when changes in the brain encourage young people to think about the world more deeply. This helps shape how adolescents see the world, how they choose to interact with it, and how they begin to develop the morals and values that will play out in their adult lives.



They start to understand that not every answer is black and white – that things are often much more complex than they originally thought. They begin to see why other people make different choices and to understand those choices better.



During this time of exploration, they prepare themselves for making complex, concrete decisions in adolescence and adulthood.



The process of setting values also can push adolescents to get involved with causes of interest to them and to become connected with the wider community. This connection to the larger world can help adolescents make positive choices that protect their health and their futures.



COMMON CHANGES IN MORAL THINKING



- **UNDERSTANDING THE “WHY” BEHIND RULES.** Adolescents start to understand concepts such as justice, public good, and safety. They ask why rules exist and want further explanations for rules such as curfews or limits.
- **FORMING MORAL CODE.** The questions and debates are normal. Explanations can help them form their views of the world and how it works.
- **MORE INTEREST IN BIG QUESTIONS.** Adolescents may think about what is right vs. wrong and what their role should be in the world. They may spend time exploring religious traditions and spend time looking at other religions and philosophies.
- **SEEING THE WORLD IN SHADES OF GRAY.** While adolescents no longer think like children, they still need time and support to process new ideas and ways of thinking. As part of this process, adolescents often question and challenge rules and those in authority.

UNIQUE ISSUES IN MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Cognitive, emotional, and social development all can have an impact on how adolescents shape their morals and values.

Adolescents' thoughts and emotions can vary across similar events. This inconsistency is normal and can be an indication that they are building their decision-making skills.

Adolescent moral and values development is based on their personality and prior experiences.

- **Connecting with the wider world.** Some adolescents may be moved by events that happen across the globe, whereas others may focus more on issues affecting their local community.
- **Optimism.** Teens can differ in their level of optimism, as well as in how much they consider things from a practical or idealistic viewpoint.
- **Diverse Interactions.** Between parents, other adults, peers, schools, religious groups, the media and the internet adolescents experience a range of views, they learn to reflect on, question, and refine their own views.
- **Trauma.** Experiencing traumatic events shape their worldview. Some research shows that tools like cognitive therapy, trauma-informed care, religion and spirituality can help a person cope with trauma.
- **Decision Making.** Life circumstances mean that some youth face more complex decisions than what they feel ready to tackle. In these cases, parents and other caring adults can play an especially vital role in providing guidance.



CHOICES

Every decision, choice, and experience plays a role in growing up.



Teens are exposed to different choices and decision making opportunities at different stages, such as...

- Posting or not posting on social media for privacy
- Getting a job or taking up a leadership position during one's free time
- Debating an issue online versus talking face-to-face
- How to balance activities and health
- Giving friends honest feedback or staying quiet

SUPPORTING MORAL DEVELOPMENT

During this time of questioning, adolescents often want to talk to parents and other adults such as coaches, teachers, and counselors. Adolescents who attend religious services may look to their faith community for supportive adults.

Talk openly about your values

Teens care about what their adult role models think and appreciate when parents and other adults are open to them. Sharing your story about how different life events shaped you helps adolescents process their own ideas.



Listen openly and don't judge

When adolescents share their concerns, they are making themselves vulnerable to your opinion. Listen to them and read their questions as valid. They will feel safe and will more likely continue coming to you for advice.



You can let teens know that it's okay to make mistakes!

Adolescence is a period of life with specific health and developmental needs and rights. It is also a time to develop knowledge and skills, learn to manage emotions and relationships, and acquire attributes and abilities that will be important for enjoying the adolescent years and assuming adult roles.

The best thing you can do for your adolescence during this time of growth, development, and challenges is to love them, support them, and be there for them.

Be supportive and reflective

A valuable part of risk-taking is that adolescents experience some of the results of their actions. It may be necessary to try and reduce the harm that can come from an adolescent's choices. Having an accurate and full picture of the results of their actions helps adolescents make decisions in the future.



When adolescents experience negative outcomes, you can help them think through a new approach for next time.



Let them explore other perspectives

Adolescents are curious about how their values and ideals fit in with those of other people. They can explore this by talking and working directly with people of other ages and backgrounds. Adolescents also can get to know other views through music, art, books, poems, movies, and plays.



Being comfortable with seeing and thinking about new ideas, even if they never adopt them, can help adolescents respect others' views and experiences.

