

Feature Article: Teenage Development

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We need to better understand adolescent developmental stages to help us not take teenage behavior as a personal attack on us. By becoming familiar with these stages, we will increase our competence in encouraging teens to establish their sense of identity.

- Teens are preparing to separate or individuate from the family. They are in the process of developing their values.
- Teenagers must initiate this separation and often rebellion gives them the energy to do this. A teenager challenges rules and values as a way of establishing his or her individuality. Adolescents cannot do this in a vacuum, but rather through conflict and confrontation.
- Adolescents may be rude or make fun of parents and other authority figures and not want to be with them. In a teenager's mind, defiance expresses autonomy and says that he or she doesn't need parents and often serves as a test of parental caring.
- Due to body changes, there can be confusion about whether teenagers really do want to grow up.
- Hormonal changes cause mood swings marked by tearfulness, heightened sensitivity, sudden flare-ups, an increased need for physical activity and inappropriate laughter and giggling.
- Teens begin to work out their relationships with their peers to find out how they fit in.
- Teens start relating to the opposite sex in a different way than they did when they were younger (where there were once friendships, romantic relationships and/or deeply felt negative emotions may surface).
- Teenagers have a heightened need for privacy. Experiencing privacy gives them a new sense of control and autonomy. They need privacy to test things out for themselves without parent input.
- Teenagers may feel all-powerful and all-knowing at the same time that they experience fears of inadequacy and failure.
- Teens still need an adult to relate to, but in a different way than they did when they were younger.