

Normal Adolescent Development:

Middle School and Early High School Years

Parents are often worried or confused by changes in their teenagers. The following information should help parents understand this phase of development.

Each teenager is an individual with a unique personality and special interests, likes and dislikes. However, there are also numerous developmental issues that everyone faces during the adolescent years. The normal feelings and behaviors of the middle school and early high school adolescent are described below.

Movement toward independence

- struggle with sense of identity
- feeling awkward or strange about one's self and one's body
- focus on self, alternating between high expectations and poor self-concept
- interests and clothing style influenced by peer group
- moodiness
- improved ability to use speech for self-expression
- realization that parents are not perfect; identification of their faults
- less overt affection shown to parents, with occasional rudeness
- complaints that parents interfere with independence
- tendency to return to childish behavior, particularly when stressed.

Future interests and cognitive changes

- mostly interested in present, limited thoughts of future
- intellectual interests expand and gain in importance
- greater ability to do work (physical, mental, emotional).

Sexuality

- displays shyness, blushing, and modesty
- girls develop physically sooner than boys
- increased interest in the opposite sex
- movement toward heterosexuality with fears of homosexuality
- concerns regarding physical and sexual attractiveness to others
- frequently changing relationships
- worries about being normal.

Morals, values, and self-direction

- rule and limit testing
- capacity for abstract thought
- development of ideals and selection of role models
- more consistent evidence of conscience
- experimentation with sex and drugs (cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana).

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Teenagers do vary slightly from the above descriptions, but the feelings and behaviors are, in general, considered normal for each stage of adolescence.

Developed by the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry.

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