

General Resources for Chatterbox Chats

This document is a collection of informational resources on a variety of topics that are relevant to young people, their lives, and the questions on the Chatterboxes. The goal of sharing these resources is to help parents, caregivers, and trusted adults access accurate information for when they are talking to their young person/s.

Parents, caregivers, and trusted adults can access the following resources by either clicking on the [blue underlined](#) text or go to the Appendix of this document.

Infographics

[The Adolescent Brain](#)

Take a look at this easy-to-read graphic that illustrates important information about how young peoples' brains function as they develop. It provides key points about how the stages in development affect behavior and actions adults can take to support young peoples' healthy risk-taking and positive opportunities for growth and skill-building.

[Talking With Teens About Relationships and Sex](#)

Review this quick guide to check in with yourself and prepare to be able to talk with the young person in your life about sex and relationships. There are helpful tips that acknowledge the awkwardness and help you prepare a plan for approaching these important conversations.

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[The Center for Parent & Teen Communication](#)

The Center for Parent & Teen Communication was founded by Kenneth Ginsburg, MD, MEd, a physician, adolescent medicine specialist, and Professor of Pediatrics at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. The center's mission is:

The Center for Parent and Teen Communication helps parents raise teens prepared to thrive. Adolescence is a time of opportunity and parents matter more than ever. We strive to ensure every caring adult has the knowledge and skills to promote positive youth development and foster strong family connections.

This site contains many useful resources in the form of short 100-word articles, videos, podcasts, research, tip sheets and tools for trusted adults and young people. Some examples of tools and tip sheets are: Build a Teen Stress Management Plan, Scripts for Parents - Teen Brain, Scripts for Parents - Teen Emotions, 5 Facts About Teen Emotions and many more. The website has sections on Growth & Development, Communication Strategies, Building Character, Health & Prevention, and For Teens.

Helpful Tip Sheets from The Center for Parent & Teen Communication

[5 Facts About Teen Emotions](#)

[5 Facts About Teen Resilience](#)

[7 C's Model of Resilience](#)

[Scripts for Parents – Teen Brain](#)

[Scripts for Parents – Teen Emotions & Seeking Professional Help](#)

[Scripts for Parents – Teen Identity](#)

[Scripts for Parents – Teen Resilience](#)

[Teen Brain Tip Sheet](#)

[Teen Emotions Tip Sheet](#)

[Teen Identity Tip Sheet](#)

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[Teen Resilience – Tips for Parents](#)

State Adolescent Health Resource Center (SAHRC), University of Minnesota

These tip sheets provide a better understanding of the physical, emotional, and social changes that young people typically experience at different ages and stages of development.

[Tasks of Early Adolescence \(ages 10-14 years\)](#)

[Tasks of Middle Adolescence \(ages 15-17 years\)](#)

[Tasks of Late Adolescence \(ages 18-24 years\)](#)

[AMAZE for Parents](#)

AMAZE provides fun videos on a variety of health and relationship topics to help parents and caregivers start conversations about these topics and to be “askable” people for youth in their lives. Follow this link to find color-coded videos topic, conversation starter scripts, and the My Amaze feature that allows adults to curate specific videos for the young person in their life to watch.

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Sexually Transmitted Diseases \(STDs\)](#)

The CDC is the nation’s leading science-based, data-driven, service organization that protects the public’s health. This webpage will provide you with information about STDs – prevention, transmission, symptoms, testing, and treatment.

[Netsmartz](#)

NetSmartz is NCMEC's online safety education program. It provides age-appropriate videos and activities to help teach children to be safer online with the goal of helping children to become more aware of potential online risks and empowering them to help prevent victimization by making safer choices on- and offline.

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Netmartz provides resources for both parents and caregivers, educators, and other trusted adults. Check out the [Resources](#) section for slides decks and tip sheets on sexting, gaming safety, sextortion, sharing photos, setting up tablets and smartphones, and so much more.

Trusted adults can register for a free Connect account to access virtual trainings available to watch at your own pace. For example, the Parent CONNECT Child Safety Virtual Discussion Series is a total of six hours broken into ten separate presentations on topics such as: Online Exploitation & Live Streaming, Cyberbullying, Responsible Use of Social Media, Keeping Boys Safer from CST, Gaming and Live Streaming and more.

[Center for Excellence in Social Media and Youth Mental Health](#)

Provides evidence-based education and technical assistance to support the mental health of children and adolescents as they navigate social media. The [Q & A Portal](#) resource has a library of expert responses to questions about mental health and social media. Further, adults can use this tool to get their questions about mental health and social media answered.

[988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#)

988 is a lifeline that provides 24/7 free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. This link will take you directly to the page on the website specific to youth.

Learning About Money Management at [Consumer.gov](#)

Explore sections about managing money, credit, loans and debt, and scam and identify left.

Planning to Finance My Goals

[Life Events](#) - having a child, higher education and trainings, life partners, home ownership, employment, owning a business, and more.

[Money Tools](#) - calculators, budgeting worksheets, and checklists

[Talk – They Hear You – by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#)

This tool asks questions about substance use, mental and physical health, general wellbeing, and family life. It provides an easy way for parents and caregivers to identify areas where their children may benefit from additional support. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to fill out the screener with their kids – this provides opportunities for discussion in the moment – but if that’s not possible, they can send it to them to complete on their own. Scree4Success can be accessed through the [“Talk. They Hear You.” Mobile app](#).

[Healthy Sexuality for Youth In Foster Care](#)

This is an online training course for parents and caregivers of youth in foster care. The purpose of the course is to help parents and caregivers of youth ages 10 and older feel more comfortable talking with youth about healthy relationships and sexuality.

[Nebraska Network of Care](#)

The Nebraska Network of Care is the statewide registry selected to provide Behavioral Health resources to support students, schools, and families.

Books

[Behind Their Screens: What Teens Are Facing \(and Adults Are](#)

[Missing\)](#) by Emily Weinstein and Carrie James

[Breaking the Hush Factor: 10 Rules for Talking with Teenagers about](#)

[Sex](#) by Dr. Karen Rayne

[Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Kids Roots and](#)

[Wings](#) book by Kenneth R. Ginsburg

[Middle School Matters](#) by Phyllis Fagell

[My Body Belongs to Me: A Parent’s Guide](#) by Elizabeth Schroeder EdD

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Raising Global Teens: A Practical Handbook for Parenting in the 21st Century by Dr. Anisha Abraham

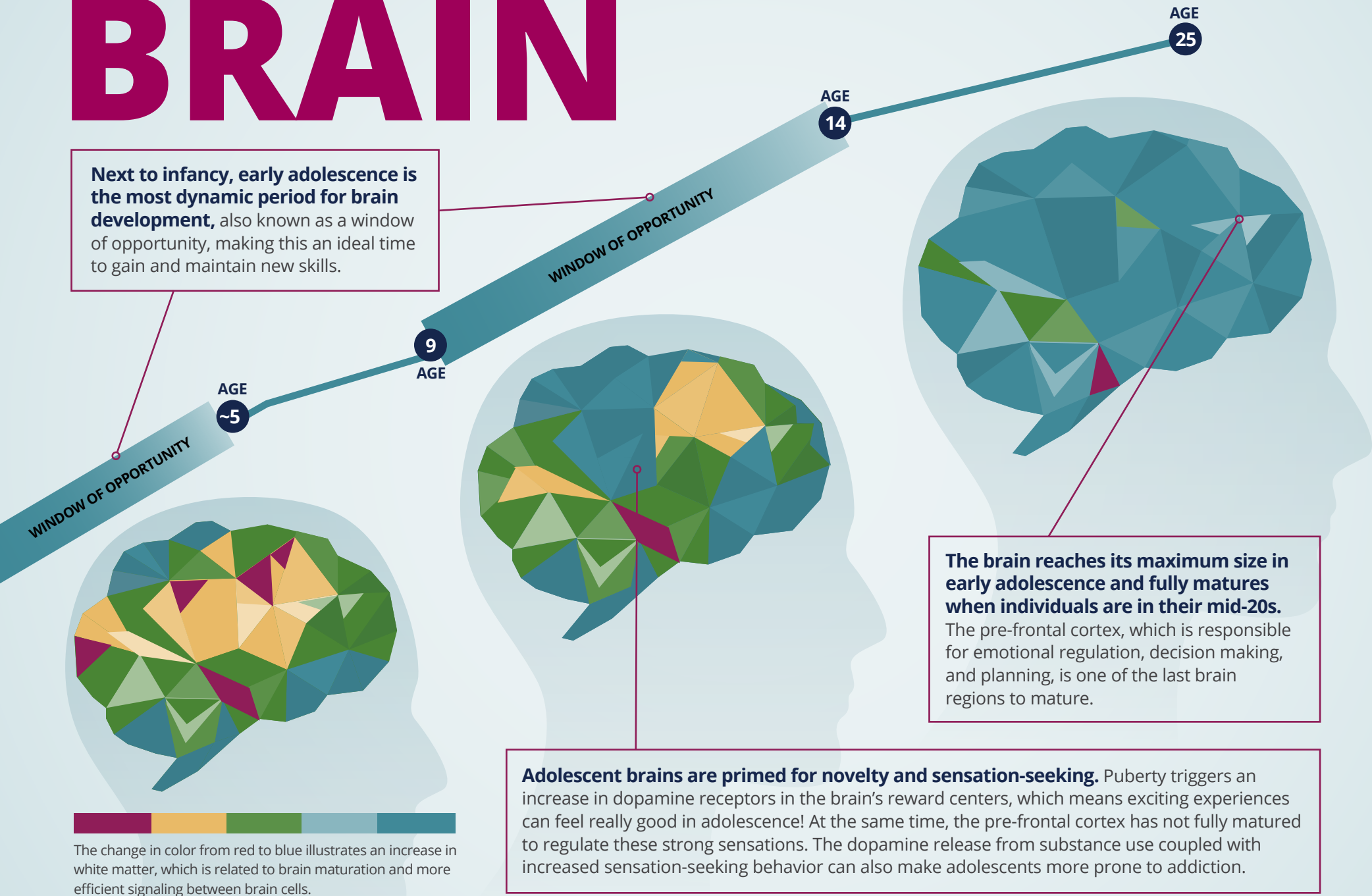
This is So Awkward: Modern Puberty Explained by Cara Natterson MD
and Vanessa Kroll Bennett

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THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN





Adolescents think and act differently, depending on the context.

Adolescents are good at making rational decisions in cold cognitive situations (situations that are calm and not emotionally arousing). However, in the heat of the moment—hot cognitive situations—adolescents' decisions are based more on what they're feeling and less on what they're thinking.



Adolescent brains are sensitive to stress and trauma.

Without the buffering support of safe and supportive relationships and environments, stress and trauma can impair brain structure and function, affecting emotional regulation and other executive functions.



Adolescents are more likely to take risks in front of peers.

The mere presence of peers, in physical or digital space, activates the reward circuitry in the brain, leading to an increased tendency to seek out novel experiences and excitement.



The adolescent brain is shaped by experience.

The process of trying new things, learning from them, and failing—with the support of caring adults—is essential for developing and learning new social, emotional, and problem solving skills.



Risk-taking is a normal part of adolescence. To support healthy risk-taking and positive learning experiences, adults can take these actions:

- Teach adolescents about the opportunities and vulnerabilities of their developing brain
- Support opportunities for healthy risk-taking, such as public speaking or trying a new hobby
- Provide youth with practice for heat-of-the-moment decision-making, especially in front of peers
- Support young people to recognize and regulate strong emotions
- Encourage youth to reflect, learn, and grow from their experiences
- Teach and model healthy coping skills, like self-regulation and effective problem solving.
- Harness the positive power of peers to encourage health-promoting experiences (e.g., invite influential peers to share positive information on sexual health and healthy relationships, use in-class peer leaders to model and facilitate key activities, provide service-learning experiences with peers and friends)
- Facilitate connections to mental health services and supports

Learn more!

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ETR Associates. (2017). *Developmental neuroscience and adolescent sexual health: Peer presence*. <https://www.etr.org/kirby-summit/>

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Office of Research – Innocenti. (2017). *The adolescent brain: A second window of opportunity*. UNICEF. https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/adolescent_brain_a_second_window_of_opportunity_a_compendium.pdf

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Population Affairs. (2018). *Adolescent development explained*. U.S. Government Printing Office. <https://opa.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/adolescent-development-explained-download.pdf>

This infographic was developed by RTI International and its subcontractor partners under contract #HHSP233201500039I Task 3 with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau.

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TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX

Both teens and parents might worry that talking about sex will be difficult.

I would feel awkward talking to my mom.

How do I start a conversation with them so they feel comfortable talking with me about it?

- My parents will yell at me, punish me, or shut down the conversation.
- If I ask questions, my parents will think I'm having (risky) sex.
- My parents won't take me seriously.
- My parents won't explain *why* they believe what they do or *why* they have certain expectations for me.



- I don't know what to say.
- I've never had this conversation before, even with my own parents.
- I don't have all the answers.
- This is an important conversation that I should have with my teen in one sitting.
- If my teen doesn't talk much, that means I'm not getting through to them.
- If I talk to my teen about sex or contraception, they will think it's ok to have sex.

But these conversations are really important. And they don't have to be scary.



Teens want to talk with parents, guardians, or other trusted adults about relationships, sex, and other difficult topics.



Teens report that their parents influence their decisions about relationships and sex — even more than their peers do.



Parents can help promote their teens' health and help them avoid risky sexual behaviors.

I would be lying if I said I felt comfortable talking to him about sex, but I have to do it.



How to have effective conversations with teens:

PREPARE

- Know your beliefs and what has shaped them — such as advice from medical experts, cultural values, religion, or research — and be ready to clearly communicate them.
- Learn where to find trusted information and advice. You could consult with your child's pediatrician, a friend, or locate credible written or electronic resources.
- Think about trusted resources your teen can turn to for information such as other trusted adults, a pediatrician, or resources you approve.
- Understand that talking about sex will not encourage your teen to have sex.

FOCUS ON *HOW* YOU COMMUNICATE

- Above all else, stay calm. Overreacting if a teen is already engaging in risky behavior may make them hesitate to share with you in the future.
- Acknowledge your teen's feelings.
- Maintain boundaries you set.
- Listen to your teen. Put down your phone and make eye contact.
- Talk and share with them. They want to know what you experienced as a teen.
- Keep it conversational and don't interrupt. Lecturing can shut down the conversation.



I wish my mom would listen to what I have to say too and not just talk.

FOCUS ON *WHAT* YOU SAY

- It's ok if you don't have all of the answers. Say you'll get back to your teen, or work with them to find the answers.
- Use trusted resources to share facts and debunk myths.
- Provide specific details. Rather than saying, "be careful," which may not be clear to your teen, you could instead describe two different ways of preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.
- Know the risks of early dating and sex, and talk through what they are and how they will impact your teen's life goals and cultural and religious values.
- Stress safety above all else.
- Don't assume your teen is engaging in behaviors they ask about.



I wish I had an open conversation with my mother the way my daughter has with me. I try to give my daughter what I didn't have.

IDENTIFY *WHEN* IS THE BEST TIME TO HAVE THESE CONVERSATIONS

- Talk to them about sex and relationships early and often. Short but frequent conversations are best.
- Use real-life events such as what is happening in your community, the news, or other media as opportunities to have conversations about sex and relationships.
- Identify calm opportunities to have conversations about sex and relationships such as in the car, after watching a TV show with your teen about teen relationships, or by text.

If my daughter gives me a small opportunity to share my thoughts, I take the opportunity.



RESOURCES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
[Talking with Your Teens about Sex: Going Beyond "the Talk"](#)
Parent and Guardian Resources: [Help your teen make healthy choices about sex](#)

Mayo Clinic
[Sex education: Talking to your teen about sex](#)

Office of Population Affairs
[Communicating Resources for Families](#)
[Healthy Parent-Child Relationships](#)

Additional resources for Native families
[Talking is Power: Tools for Parents \(Healthy Native Youth\)](#)
[We R Native](#)
[Native Youth Sexual Health Network](#)

REFERENCES

Parent and teen quotes used throughout this document have been adapted from actual quotes in the following publications:

Guzman, L., Golub, E., Caal, S., Hickman, S., & Ramos, M. (2013, November). Let's (not) talk about sex: Communication and teen pregnancy prevention within Hispanic families. *Child Trends*, Publication #2013-50. <https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/2013-50LetsNotTalkAboutSex.pdf>

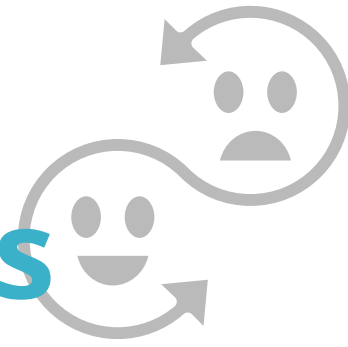
Holman, A., & Kellas, J. K. (2018). "Say something instead of nothing": Adolescents' perceptions of memorable conversations about sex-related topics with their parents. *Communication Monographs*, 85(3), 357-379. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2018.1426870>

Moore, K. A., Manlove, J., Walker, K., & Guzman, L. (2013). Reducing teen childbearing among Latinos: An innovative anti-poverty strategy. *Child Trends*, Publication #2013-55. <https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/2013-55Reducing-Teen-Childbearing-Among-Latinos1.pdf>



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5 Facts About Teen Emotions



1

Adolescence is a unique and exciting time for emotional development

- Adolescence is a time of **intense emotions** because the emotion centers of the brain are growing rapidly.
- Teens may experience **more extreme emotional highs and lows** because they face more responsibilities and challenges. Learning to feel and process a wide range of emotions is crucial.
- **Parental love and guidance** remain key even as peer relationships take on greater emotional importance.

2

Emotions develop in stages based on age and experience

- **Pre-teens** (about 11-12 years old) experiencing the first changes of puberty may feel awkward or self-conscious. Or they may feel excited about getting taller or gaining muscle. They may compare themselves to peers as they adjust to their changing body.
- **Young teens** (about 13-16 years old) are developing their ability to process different emotional reactions. They may have strong emotions – both good and bad – to social situations. They may want to figure out things for themselves, rather than immediately getting advice from an adult.
- **Older teens and young adults** (about 17-21 years old) are beginning to develop more sophisticated planning and problem-solving skills, helping them navigate emotions. They may begin shifting focus from peer groups to individual relationships.

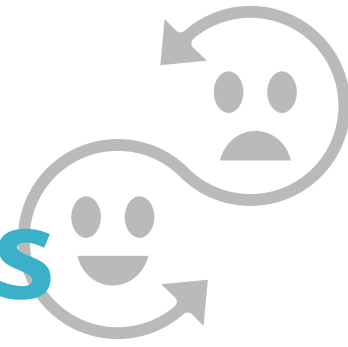
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Teens are learning how to explore their emotions

- Teens are developing their ability to **name, process, and release** their feelings.
- Parents are **essential role models** for teens. Teens mirror parents' emotional reactions; if parents are calm in heated moments, teens more likely will be as well.
- It's normal for teens to sometimes **express their strongest emotions** to the adults they are closest to. This is because they know they can express all of their feelings – good and uncomfortable – in the safety of a trusted relationship.



5 Facts About Teen Emotions



4

Teens are learning how to express their emotions

- Teens need to learn to **express emotions** regularly so that stress does not build up inside.
- If parents try to shield teens entirely from pain or sadness, they risk diminishing their teens' ability to manage a full range of emotions. **Experiencing and learning to manage** a bit of pain builds resolve, compassion, and resilience.
- Teens **struggling to process their emotions** may turn to drugs or other temporary and potentially harmful escapes to instead hide or bottle up their feelings. This may signal teens need support to cope with stress.

5

Emotional distress may look different in teens than adults

- **Signs of depression** include sadness, weight change, trouble sleeping, lack of energy, disinterest in activities, substance use, and thoughts of harming themselves. It is critical to note it may look like anger and rage in teens even without sadness.
- **Signs of anxiety** in teens may include repeated worries about routine parts of life, excessive irritability, trouble sleeping or concentrating, and frequent physical complaints like headaches or fatigue. Anxiety in teens can be biologically rooted or driven by unrealistic expectations from adults, peer pressure, increasing school and home responsibilities, and an uncertain world.
- **Talk of suicide** should always be taken seriously and never ignored or dismissed. Asking about feelings of suicide does NOT increase the risk of suicide, it positions you to help. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 (TALK). Crisis Text Line: Text START to 741-741.



Approximately 1.5 million US teens have a depression diagnosis, with older teens (15-17 years old) and young women at the greatest risk of major depressive episodes.

Approximately 2.6 million teens have an anxiety diagnosis. Nearly 1 in 3 teens will experience an anxiety disorder.

Source: CDC/NIMH



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5 Facts About Teen Resilience

1

Resilience is the ability to thrive in both good and challenging times.

- Coping skills, confidence, and connection with others allows teens to rebound from difficult times and positions them to get the most out of life.
- Resilience enables children to be their best selves, experience healthy relationships, and make contributions to their communities.



2

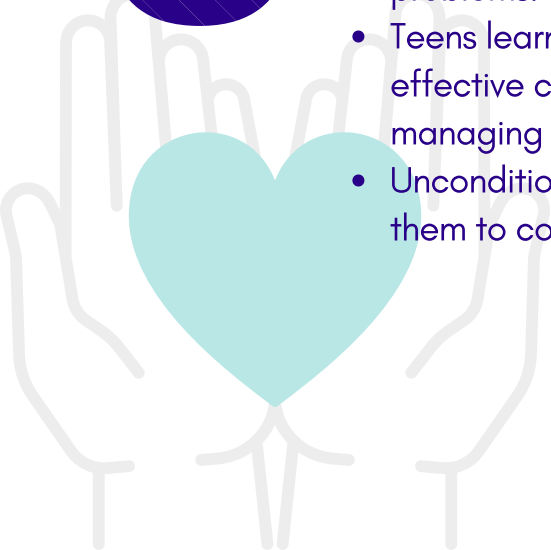
Resilience can be built and nurtured as a part of development.

- Anyone can be resilient. Resilience is built from ordinary human interactions, not extraordinary measures.
- Meaningful support and love from others build resilience in teens.

3

Parents play an essential role in the development of resilience.

- Parents build teen resilience by giving them skills to handle their own problems.
- Teens learn healthy ways to manage stress when parents model effective coping strategies like sleeping, healthy eating, exercising, and managing emotions.
- Unconditional love from parents gives teens the security that allows them to counterbalance and withstand challenges and stress.





5 Facts About Teen Resilience

4

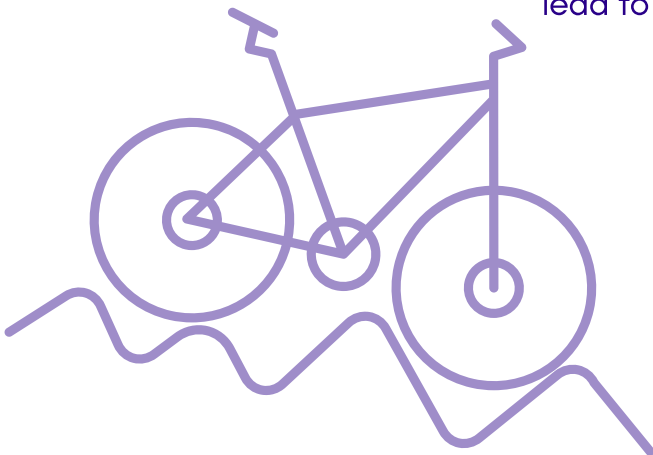
Resilience requires flexibility.

- Resilience enables teens to be able to adapt to different situations.
- Parents can prepare teens to handle challenges even when they aren't around.
- Resilience means having the skill-sets to face and overcome obstacles.

5

Resilience is uneven.

- Teens may need additional support from parents and caring adults to bounce back from difficult or traumatic situations.
- Teens may need more compassion, empathy, and understanding from caring adults if they use a lot of energy to face a serious challenge.
- Being resilient does not make one invulnerable. In fact, the energy needed to maintaining resilience in one area may lead to increased vulnerability in other areas.





The 7 C's Model of Resilience

#1 CONFIDENCE

- Confidence helps teens believe they can thrive. They see failure as an opportunity to grow.
- To build confidence, offer specific praise when teens demonstrate positive character traits.
- Set high but reachable expectations with clear boundaries.
- Notice and encourage the effort teens put into their academic, social, and personal lives.

#2 COMPETENCE

- Competence is having the knowledge and skills to do something successfully and efficiently. Some of these skills include: communication, self-advocacy, peer negotiation, and academics.
- Encourage competence in teens by noticing and building the skills they already have while recognizing which skills they still need to develop.
- Model competency by working through problems with teens and actively listening. Talk **with** them instead of **at** them.

#3 CONNECTION

- Human connection is vital for celebrating good times and recovering from challenging times.
- Be someone that adolescents can come to for help. Provide unconditional love and support and refrain from making quick judgments.
- Allow teens space to grow while still maintaining a close relationship and open communication. Set clear boundaries to guide behavior. These relationships are fundamental and provide stability as teens grow. Relationships with many trusted adults in different parts of their lives is vital to sustain teen growth.
- A solid and loving connection to parents is the most important and protective force in teens' lives that can help counterbalance challenges and stress.

#4 CHARACTER

- Teens with solid character strengths contribute to their communities, have a strong sense of self, and experience secure and healthy relationships as they undergo a critical time of development.
- Give teens space to try new things and discover what they value.
- Teens need space to experiment with new experiences and discover what is important to them.
- Notice and praise children's character strengths, like helpfulness, kindness, and generosity.
- Set a good example for teens. The things parents do and the way they act influence teen behaviors.



The 7 C's Model of Resilience

#5 CONTRIBUTION

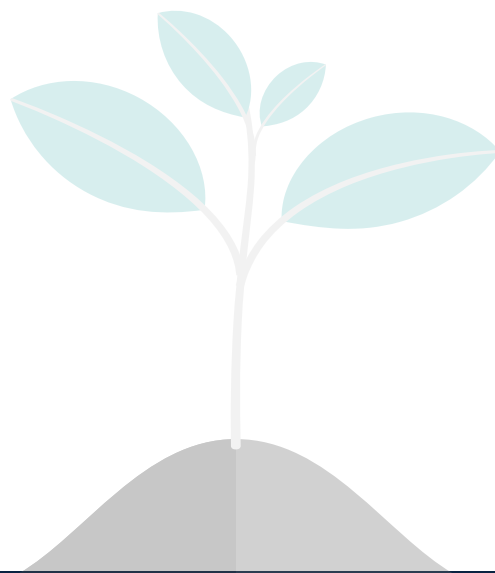
- Giving back gives adolescents a sense of meaning and purpose.
- Making a difference in someone else's life helps teens understand that we serve others out of pleasure, not pity. Knowing this, they will more comfortably receive help when they need it.
- Provide opportunities for teens to volunteer or help others so they aren't afraid to ask for help themselves.

#6 COPING

- Stress is a part of life, and how adolescents cope with that stress may have lasting impacts.
- Encourage exercise, journaling, or talking to a trusted adult as healthy ways to cope.
- Model how you deal with stress during challenging times.
- Make stress relief a family affair. Take a family walk or make a meal together to unwind.

#7 CONTROL

- Adolescents need to develop a sense of control over their own lives.
- Balance giving teens independence while maintaining boundaries for safety.
- Allow teens to make their own choices, even if that means making mistakes.



Established in 2017, **Center for Parent and Teen Communication** is a multidisciplinary team based within the Division of Adolescent Medicine at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Center for Parent and Teen Communication offers practical, science-based strategies for strengthening family connections and building youth prepared to thrive. For additional resources, visit parentandteen.com. For media inquiries contact Eden Pontz (pontzee@chop.edu).



Teen Brain Scripts For Parents

Conversations with teens can be improved when we adjust our communication based on understanding what is happening in the teen brain. The examples below take into consideration that the entire teen brain is rapidly developing. The emotional centers are particularly well developed while the reasoning centers are developing a bit slower. Stress activates those well-developed emotional centers causing them to overpower the part of the brain needed for thoughtful decision-making and planning.

HOMEWORK

Say this...

"You worked so hard this semester and I'd hate for one missed assignment to mess up your chances to make the honor roll. What's your plan for getting this assignment done on time?"

...not this

"You need to finish your homework right now because if you don't you'll get a bad grade, then you'll miss the honor roll, and I don't even want to think about what that means for how you're getting into college!"

Why?

Teen brains react to emotions first and explanations second. Teens will grasp a parents' anger and disappointment during a lecture, which stresses them out. A stressed out brain cannot easily process information and struggles to understand the intended message.

STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

Say this...

"Are you okay? It upsets me that you had to break up a fight at school. I need a bit of space and time to think this through. I'll get back to you. We'll get through this together."

...not this

"It doesn't matter that you tried to break up the fight at school today! You could've been hurt or suspended! This is serious!"

Why?

All brains work best under cool, calm conditions. Teens are better able to process information and learn while calm. Unless safety is a concern, parents should take time to compose themselves so they can have a calm discussion.

RULES & BOUNDARIES

Say this...

"We ask you to stay home on weeknights so we can all get enough sleep and be prepared for work and school tomorrow. Maybe things will be different when school is out for the summer. We can discuss it then. Does that make sense?"

...not this

"My house, my rules. You can't go out on a school night with your friends and that's final. This isn't up for debate."

Why?

Young people are developing their reasoning muscles and respond well to explanations especially when they reinforce that parents care about them. When they feel like rules are about controlling them it activates their emotional centers. Their frustration may prevent them from benefiting from the intended guidance. Because teen brains' reward centers encourage time with peers, rules that keep them away from friends may stir particular frustration and will be rejected unless the teen is calmly offered an explanation that is rooted in their well-being.



Teen Emotions

Scripts For Parents

SEEKING PROFESSIONAL HELP



Teens and parents may have a lot of feelings when it comes to seeking professional help. Below are examples of language for how to address teen concerns, and why that language is important.

Why treatment works

Teen: "How can it help? Why waste my time?"

Parent: "Therapists have a lot of training and know which strategies work best to help people your age. They'll make sure this is going to work for you and what you need."

This is probably the biggest barrier to seeking help. Teens who are struggling may lack hope that anything will change. Hopelessness can be a temporary part of emotional distress. It may be hard for teens battling depression to see the light at the end of the tunnel, or for those with severe anxiety to feel like they will ever stop worrying.

Time invested will pay off

Teen: "There's no time for this."

Parent: "Time spent working with a therapist will pay off. It'll help you feel better, which will allow you to spend more time and energy on the things you love to do."

Calmness is key. A highly anxious teen may worry that the time invested in counseling will only make them fall behind in other areas of their lives. Their anxiety may make it difficult for them to hear your words. Parents' even-tempered calmness reinforces that their teens' mental well-being comes first.

Seeking treatment is an act of strength

Teen: "I can handle it. I don't need anybody else. I don't need anybody feeling sorry for me."

Parent: "You deserve to feel better. Therapists and counselors who work with young people do so because they care about and respect them. They are committed to making life better for them."

Make it clear that seeking help is an act of strength. Strong people know they are capable of feeling better, deserve to feel better, and will take steps to feel better. Reframe that help is not what they "need," but what they "deserve." It is genuinely brave and self-aware to be able to state, "I don't feel right, and I deserve to feel better."

Counseling is about guidance, not being "fixed"

Teen: "I'll figure it out. No one can understand what I've been through. How could they fix it?"

Parent: "Therapists will guide you to become stronger, make good decisions, get through challenges, and manage uncomfortable feelings by using skills you already have and by teaching you new ones."

Counselors are there to support, but the young person does the real work. Professionals do not give answers or solve problems. Rather they find each person's strengths and build upon them. Patients solve their problems with the support of professionals, family, and friends.



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Scripts For Parents

SEEKING PROFESSIONAL HELP



Strong teens become strong adults

Teen: "I'm so angry all of the time!"

Parent: "I know you're angry, and I think you deserve to be happy. The sensitivity to your feelings you're showing me now tells me you're going to be a strong, caring adult."

Adolescence is a time of heightened emotions. The part of the brain that manages emotions is growing rapidly. Reinforce that the same sensitivity and depth of caring that troubles teens now is what positions them to have a full, rich life later. Reinforce that people who care make the best friends, life partners, colleagues, and parents.

Professionals honor privacy

Teen: "I don't want everybody to know my business."

Parent: "Therapists honor privacy and will not judge you. You decide what to tell them. I'm always here to support you and listen to anything you want to tell me. I'm happy you have another adult you can trust."

Another common roadblock to getting teens on board with seeing a professional stems from their desire for privacy. They might not realize that professionals honor privacy and work to serve without judgment. Make it clear that you will honor the private nature of that relationship.

Professionals support you as a parent; they do not replace you

Teen: "Why can't I just talk to you or my friends? My friends can relate to me better than any adult can."

Parent: "Therapists want to help. They won't be disappointed or angered by what you tell them. You can trust them to support you and don't replace the love and support of me or your friends."

A professional's role is to support through their specialized training. They won't be shocked, disappointed, hurt, or angry. They want to hear about teens' feelings. Relationships with friends and family are different; teens may worry about disappointing them or hurting their relationships. Professional guidance never replaces the love and support of family or friends.

Teens are not alone

Teen: "I'm just a freak."

Parent: "You are a person who is wise enough to know that you are struggling."

Underscore that we all struggle sometimes. Help teens understand the powerful combination of self-awareness and personal advocacy in being aware of what they are feeling, knowing when they need support, and being strong enough to reach out.

Professional support can strengthen relationships

Teen: "I've messed everything up."

Parent: "I love you. I know your behavior isn't a reflection of who you are -- just what you're going through. You deserve to feel better and I want to find someone who will help us accomplish that."

It is common to take stress out on the people you love because it feels safe to chance revealing our most uncomfortable thoughts and feelings in trusted relationships. It is not unusual for teens to push friends and family away precisely when they need the most support. Parents should make it clear that their love is unconditional, and they understand how teens' behavior reflects that they are going through something.



Teen Identity Scripts For Parents

Respond with your unwavering presence and unconditional love!



What to say when your teen...

questions their worth



"You are you. And I couldn't imagine wishing you were anyone different."

makes a mistake



"I know you can [ex: be kinder to your brother]. You are the same young man who [ex: kept us from killing any bugs when we went camping]. You've always been [ex: compassionate and protective]. Your brother needs that side of you now."

faces bigotry



"Your voice matters. You matter. I want you to know I love you. You matter to me. As your parent, I hope the world can see you through a loving, kind, and caring lens. And when it doesn't, I am here to walk this journey with you."

feels pressured about life choices



"Figuring out who you are is a lifelong process. We have opportunities for self-improvement — even reinvention — throughout our lives. We all make mistakes. Over time we learn that the measure of our character is how we make amends and grow from our experiences."

comes out as LGBTQIA+



"Thank you for trusting me enough to tell me. I love and support you always. I need time and space to process what I'm feeling. But I am not going anywhere. We are in this together, and I will do the work it takes to learn how to be fully supportive."

is caught in a lie



"I am concerned because you lied to us about [ex: where you went tonight and who you were with]. I know you can do better because I've seen you come to us [ex: concerned when your friend stole something]. I need you to remember how much you value honesty and apply it now."

could use some constructive feedback



"I know you can do better at [ex: setting and making deadlines]. With some practice, you can get this right. Remember, there was a time you thought you would never learn to [ex. cook a meal for yourself]. But look at you now. You worked hard and [ex. mastered enough to cook dinner for the family]. Let me know how I can support you now."



Scripts For Parents Teen Resilience



What to say when your teen...



...comes to you upset about a situation

Say this... "This must feel awful. In time, it will hurt less. You will even grow stronger from it, even though it feels so bad now."

...not this: "This isn't that bad."

Validate your child's feelings. Listen and acknowledge what they share. Talk about resilience as something that is built and developed by actions like working through challenging situations and emotions. Don't belittle your teen's feelings and say things like "It's not that bad," despite what you may think as this will make them less likely to approach you in the future and drastically reduce their support system.



... encounters a problem that they don't immediately know how to solve

Say this... "You will get through this, what can I do to support you?"

...not this: "Don't worry, I will fix this for you."

Allow your child to take the lead in solving their problems when possible. Don't immediately jump in. Ask if they want your guidance. Let them bounce their ideas off of you. This builds their confidence and problem-solving skills and empowers them to deal with challenges in the future. Exploration during adolescence is vital for growth and maturation, teens need to be able to make mistakes and figure things out, with constant presence, love, and support from the people in their lives.



... is mad or sad about a mistake they made

Say this... "I know this feels scary, but can this really hurt you? Will it feel so bad in a week or a month from now?"

...not this: "This is so horrible, it could ruin your life..." OR "This isn't a big deal."

Emotions can run high during adolescence. Listen to your teen's concerns. Talk about the real effects of the mistake to help your child bounce back. Don't minimize or blow things out of proportion. Help them express how they feel. Work with them to find a solution. This shows that you appreciate the wide range of emotions your teen is experiencing.

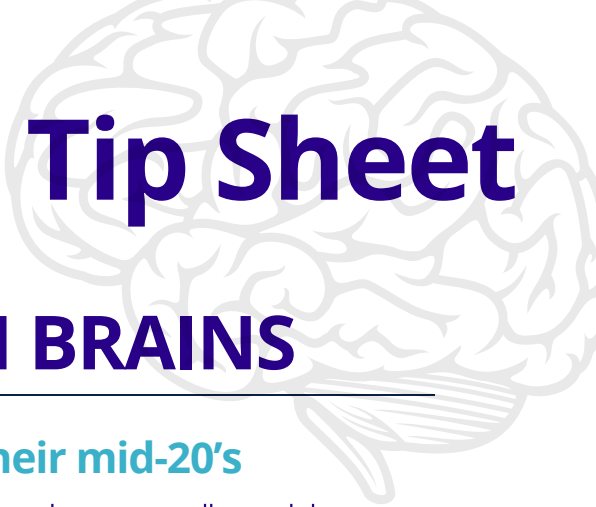


... gets distressed easily

Say this... "It is great to see how much you care. Your challenge is caring without letting it hurt you too much."

...not this: "You are too sensitive."

Emotions can be uncomfortable, but we have to help teens know that having emotions is a good thing that will benefit them and others. Their journey is in learning how to manage the uncomfortable feelings that sometimes come with emotions.



5 FACTS ABOUT TEEN BRAINS

1 Teen brains continue to develop until their mid-20's

- When teens are calm, they have the ability to problem solve almost as well as adults.
- The changes that occur between puberty and the mid-20s create a period of intense learning about who we are and who we want to be.
- Drugs, alcohol, and excess stress are particularly harmful to growing brains.

2 Different parts of teen brains grow at different rates

- The entire teen brain is growing rapidly.
- Teen emotions are close to the surface because their brains are wired to experience feelings. Their intense emotions are a sign of brain growth.

3 Teen brains are flexible

- Teens are searching for new experiences and knowledge. This helps generate more efficient connections in the brain that can lead to new ways of thinking, creative ideas, and opinions about the world.
- Adolescence is a time of opportunity. Teens gain thinking and reasoning, social, and emotional skills, and begin to figure out their interests, goals, and who they are as people.

4 The “feel-good” chemical dopamine is highly active in teen brains and rewards new experiences

- All teens must test limits to maximize learning and brain development.
- The highly active reward centers in the brain push teens towards seeking new and exciting experiences.

5 Learning doesn't just happen at school

- Teens learn at a fast pace. They need plenty of opportunities to learn.
- Teens are #superlearners! Their brains are rapidly taking in information that will last a lifetime.
- The teen brain is wired to absorb experiences at a fast clip. Brain growth is shaped by the lessons offered at home, by friends and community role models, and in school.



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Teen Brain Tip Sheet

5 TIPS FOR PARENTS

#1 AVOID THE LECTURE

Why?

- Lectures are often given when emotions are running high.
 - Teen brains react to emotions first and explanations second. Teens will perceive anger and disappointment during a lecture, which stresses them out. A stressed out brain cannot easily process information and struggles to understand the intended message.
 - Lectures push buttons and enhance fears, but don't teach lasting lessons.
-

#2 GUIDE DECISION-MAKING

Why?

- The reasoning center of the teen brain is developing rapidly but at a slower rate than the emotional center.
 - Parents can guide their teens' ability to make good choices by helping them learn not to make important decisions when emotional.
 - Because peers activate the reward center of the brain, encourage teens to give themselves space away from peers before making big decisions.
-

#3 HAVE CALM DISCUSSIONS

Why?

- Brains work best under calm conditions. Teens are better able to process information and learn while calm.
 - Unless safety is a concern, parents should take time to compose themselves so they can have a calm discussion. Model how to make decisions after you've had a chance to cool off.
 - Teens grow best when we create calm settings that allow them to do their best thinking.
-

#4 SUPPORT EXPLORATION WITHIN SAFE BOUNDARIES

Why?

- Teen brains are wired to seek out new experiences. This is how people gain life-long knowledge.
 - Young people need to test limits and stretch boundaries as they strive to become more independent. They also need boundaries to ensure they stay safe and take actions consistent with good values.
 - Remember to show some flexibility and increased independence as they prove they are responsible.
 - Taking healthy risks allows their brains to grow. Provide plenty of opportunities for teens to try new things that are both exciting and safe.
 - Let your teen fail. With each effort to get back up, young people grow stronger, wiser, and more creative.
-

#5 CREATE A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT FOR BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Why?

- Encourage teens to eat a well-balanced diet, exercise for at least 20 minutes a day, and get 8-10 hours of sleep. These conditions are ideal for growing brains and mental/physical development.
- Sustained and high levels of stress are damaging to the brain's emotional and physical development. Adult support is essential and protective.
- Alcohol and drugs offer temporary escapes from stress, but can be destructive to healthy brain development. Guide teens toward [healthy coping strategies](#) by modeling them yourself and letting them know healthy choices can make them feel better.
- When parents model healthy behaviors, teens are more likely to pick them up.



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Teen Emotions

5 Tips for Parents



#1 Don't make assumptions

- **Jumping to conclusions** can backfire and lead to anger, frustration, and a communication breakdown.
- Teens need to learn to **manage situations** on their own and make mistakes.
- To become independent, teens need **time and space** to solve problems and seek guidance on their terms.
- **Teens are the experts** in their own lives. Respect your experience, but trust teens to say what they feel and need.

#2 Inquire and listen

- Telling teens what to do or critiquing mistakes can **create tension** as teens develop independence.
- Teens do not always **seek advice** right away; sometimes they want to talk it out and arrive at their own solutions. Be a sounding board instead of immediately offering opinions.
- It may take time for teens to **process what they are feeling**. Let them know you're available whenever they want to talk and when they do, listen, ask questions, affirm their feelings, and remind them you love them.

#3 Role model how to cope with stress (including caring for yourself!)

- **A bit of stress** can be energizing. The main concern for teens is that too much stress will feel overwhelming and lead them to shut down or become numb.
- **Human connection** is one of the most effective coping strategies. When we connect we gain and lend strength. It reminds us that we are not alone and that we are cared for and about.
- **Healthy coping strategies** like exercise, relaxation, good nutrition, and sleep help teens manage their emotions long-term.
- Avoiding people, places, and things that **trigger intense emotions** saves energy.
- **Practicing self-care** as a parent isn't selfish; it shows teens how to care for themselves.

#4 Teach teens healthy ways to discover and express their emotions

- **Healthy escapes**, like reading or meditating, provide teens with safe, effective ways to feel better + prevent the need to turn to dangerous quick fixes.
- Teach teens to find comfortable, healthy outlets for pent-up feelings by **expressing emotions**. Have them complete this sentence: "I ___ it out." For example, I "ran, wrote, talked, prayed, drew, danced, rapped" it out.
- It can help to **take breaks from feeling so much** by taking advantage of the imagination and focusing on other interests and hobbies.

#5 Remember that seeking professional help is a sign of strength

- **Emotional discomfort** is treatable, and teens need to know they deserve to feel better.
- **Seeking professional help** is not about giving up, it's about reaching out.
- **Professional guidance** can make a real difference in teens' lives; youth-serving professionals know how to support teens.



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Teen Identity Development

5 Tips for Parents



#1 Teens build their personal identity on messages they receive from people they know and trust.

- Parents, peers, and other adult mentors send messages to teens that help them figure out who they are. **Expose your teen to people from different backgrounds and life experiences** to give them a wealth of identities to draw from.
- Teens may build their identities around their peers' interests. This could be religion, activism, athletics, hobbies, or academics. **Teens should be encouraged to explore**, as long as they are not placing themselves in danger and their new interests or affiliations don't conflict with the core value of respecting other people.
- Teens are always looking to their parents for feedback. **Be a sounding board** for your child as they try out their different identities. Make sure your teen knows you love them without condition, just the way they are.
- Media representations of teens are often inaccurate and stereotypical. We need to **highlight positive representations of teens** that depict their idealism and desire to do the right thing.

#2 Self-exploration is important.

- For teens, self-exploration can be challenging. **Recognize they need consistency and support** during this stage of their life.
- Teens are particularly sensitive to feedback from others, especially peers. **Allow your teen to explore** joining different groups and spending time with diverse people.
- Teens may begin exploring or questioning different aspects of their identity, including their gender or sexual orientation. **Supporting and loving your teen** is the most important thing you can do.
- **Teens must try new things and test new values** before discovering which "hats" fit best.

#3 Openly and honestly discuss race, gender, religion, sexuality, stereotypes, and biases.

- **Race, gender, and religion** can be fundamental parts of one's identity development. It is important for teens to be confident in what they mean to them.
- **Talking about these topics early and often** helps teens understand what they mean and how they can affect others.
- **Embrace and celebrate** what makes us different and unique. Doing so makes it easier for teens to have meaningful relationships with people of different backgrounds and recognize injustices faced by minority groups.
- **Loving and accepting** your teen has several benefits for all teens, but especially LGBTQ+ youth who often face challenges as they come out.
- **Feeling good about and connected to a group** that shares your identity is linked with improvements in school performance, mental well-being, and physical health.



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Teen Identity Development

5 Tips for Parents



#4 Be a role model by making reflective and thoughtful decisions.

- Identity development starts in earnest during adolescence and continues for the rest of our lives. **Model giving second chances and growing from experiences** early on so your teen can follow your example.
- Adolescence is a time when we start making important decisions about who we want to be when we're older. Work to **model careful consideration of weighing the options** when making big decisions.
- **Model what a healthy adult looks like.** Make time for pleasure to show that adulthood is still fun while maintaining boundaries and safe decision-making.

#5 Be a supportive parent by encouraging safe exploration. Expect teens to want more independence.

- Allow teens to **experience new things** integral to their identity, like sports, art, music, religion, community service.
- **Get involved** if your teen is engaging in behaviors that threaten safety or morality.
- Teens must know **you will love them as they are.**
- Your teen may **make new friends and grow apart from others.** This is a normal part of identity exploration.
- Your teen may **grow more distant** as they try to discover themselves and push family away. It can be helpful to remind yourself that this is temporary.
- Your teen may **express themselves in different ways on social media** -- a popular and important part of adolescent life.
- Be cautious of social media while allowing teens their independence. **Highlight the positive messages** spread on social media and challenge the undermining ones.



Teen Resilience

3 Tips for Parents



1 We all have the ability to be resilient by developing certain character strengths and making human connections. It's like a scale — we can stack on positive things, remove negative ones, or both.

- Resilience can be learned and developed in **anyone**.
- **Resilience is a journey** that begins in early childhood but continues developing well into adulthood.
- Help develop your teen's **coping, problem-solving, and social-emotional skills** to cultivate resilience.
- Resilience helps people **better recover** from harmful experiences.

2 Resilience doesn't mean invulnerability.

- Resilience is about **rebounding** from challenges and **thriving** during good times.
- Even people with high levels of resilience **have their limits** and can experience setbacks.
- Encourage teens to **express emotions** in healthy ways so they learn to share their intense feelings.

3 Parents are instrumental in building resilience in adolescents.

- Teens need skill-sets to navigate the world independently and **bounce back** from adversity.
- Model **positive coping strategies** in the face of challenges. Teens learn from the healthy ways parents and other caring adults manage their stress.
- Offer **unconditional love** to give teens security and support that will enable them to withstand challenges.
- Being unconditional in our love doesn't mean we like everything our children are doing. It means that our presence, involvement, and caring, is always something **they can rely upon**.

Adjust to new physical sense of self

Young adolescents experience rapid and profound physical changes triggered by hormones acting on different parts of their bodies. In early adolescence these include:

- Rapid physical growth and body changes.
- Uneven growth of bones, muscles, and organs, sometimes resulting in awkward appearance.
- Frequent feelings of fatigue.
- Intense concern with body image; may be self-conscious about growth.
- Worries about being normal, with peers often perceived as the standard.

Adjust to a sexually maturing body and feelings

With the significant changes they experience in adolescence, youth must adapt sexually and establish a sense of sexual identity. This includes incorporating a sense of gender identity; establishing values about sexual behavior; and developing skills for romantic relationships. In early adolescence:

- Individuals assigned female at birth (AFAB) generally develop earlier than those assigned male at birth (AMAB).
- Young people of all genders experience shyness, blushing, a sense of modesty, and greater interest in privacy.
- Individuals experience emerging sexual feelings and exploration.
- Normal behavior includes experimentation with their own body (masturbation).
- Worries about being normal are normal.
- Contact with potential romantic partners happens in friend groups.

Brain Development

By age 6 (on average), a young person’s brain is 95% of its adult size. However, the brain continues to physically develop in the teen years and even into the 20s. A second growth spurt of gray matter (peaking at age 11-12) is followed by a “pruning” process in which connections among neurons in the brain that are not used wither away and those that are used remain. The front part of the brain, responsible for functions such as complex reasoning, problem-solving, thinking ahead, prioritizing, long-term planning, self-evaluation and regulation of emotion, begins to develop in early adolescence with a final developmental push starting at age 16 or 17. ***It is not that these tasks cannot be done before young adulthood, but rather that it takes more effort and requires practice.***

Physical growth & puberty		Assigned male at birth (AMAB)	Assigned female at birth (AFAB)
Growth starts (average)		Age 14 (range 12–16)	Age 12 (range 10–14)
1-year average height increase during growth spurt		4.1”	3.5”
Starting age of puberty (average)		Age 11–12 (range 9–14), individuals continue to grow for about six years after the first visible signs of puberty. May not finish until age 21.	Age 10–11 (range 8–13), individuals continue to grow for about four years after the first visible signs of puberty.
Length of puberty		3–4 years	4–5 years
Progression of changes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Growth of testicles and penis ▪ First ejaculation (avg. age 13-14; age range 12-16) ▪ Hair growth in pubic area and armpits ▪ Muscle growth, deepening voice, acne and facial hair develop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Breast development ▪ Hair growth in pubic area and armpits ▪ Acne ▪ Menstruation starts (average 12-13; range 10-16)
Young people of all genders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enter puberty now at earlier ages than ever. ▪ Experience a wide range of “normal.” ▪ Experience physical maturation and cognitive development in stages that don’t always correlate to each other (e.g. youth that look physically older do not yet necessarily have higher levels of cognitive ability). 		

Define a personal sense of identity

Adolescents move from identifying themselves as an extension of their parents (childhood) to recognizing their uniqueness and separateness from parents. They develop a sense of self as an individual and as a person connected to valuable people and groups. They refine their sense of identity, exploring issues such as Who am I? How do I fit in? Am I loveable and loving? How am I competent? This process often manifests as exploration of alternative styles of dress, jewelry, music, hair, and mannerisms. Teens may struggle to identify a true self amid seeming contradictions in the way they feel and behave in different situations, and with fluctuating levels of thought and understanding.

In early adolescence:

- Identity is influenced by relationships with family members, teachers, and, increasingly, by peers.
- Worries about being normal are normal, with peers being viewed as the standard.
- Often magnify their own problems and feel misunderstood.
- Feel observed by an imaginary audience.

Adopt a personal values system

Adolescents develop a more complex understanding of moral behavior and underlying principles of justice. They question and assess beliefs from childhood and restructure these beliefs into a personal ideology (e.g. more personally meaningful values, religious views, and belief systems to guide decisions and behavior).

Early adolescents:

- Begin to question and try out value systems.
- Move from thinking in terms of "What's in it for me" fairness (e.g., if you did this for me, I would do that for you), to wanting to gain social approval and live up to the expectations of

people close to them-- "golden rule" morality. As they become able to see the perspectives of others, they may place the needs of others over their own self-interest.

Renegotiate relationship with parents/caregivers

Adolescents negotiate a change in relationship with parents that begins to balance autonomy (independence) with connection. Overall, the adolescent's task is one of separating in some ways, while maintaining and redefining connections in others. Through this process, they make room for a more adult relationship that both meets cultural expectations and provides necessary support.

In early adolescence:

- Differentiation presents as being argumentative with their adults.
- Individuals tend to be closely attached to parental figures.
- Their parents are still making most of their decisions for them.
- Their parents' listening skills can support their development.

Develop stable and productive peer relationships

Peer relationships change during adolescence, giving youth more support and connections as they spend less time with adults and in supervised activities. These peer relationships often compete with parents and schools in terms of their influence on teen's attitudes and behaviors. As networks with peers broaden, peer relationships become deeper and play an increasing role in shaping an individual's self-concept and interaction.

Throughout adolescence, teens experience three changes in their peer relationships:

- Reorientation of friendships from activity-based relationships of childhood to more stable, affectively oriented friendships based on idea and value sharing.
- Growth of romantic and sexually

oriented relationships.

- Emergence of peer "crowds." Throughout adolescence, friendships become more stable, intimate and supportive, providing a cornerstone for learning about adult relationships.

Early adolescents:

- Experience increasing influence of and connection to peers.
- Start choosing friendships based on affective characteristics (loyalty, trust, and willingness to confide) rather than shared interests and activities.
- Gravitate toward same-gender friends and group activities.
- Begin to label or group their peers (e.g. cliques).
- Experience fear of peer rejection.

Meet demands of increasingly mature roles and responsibilities.

Adolescents gradually take on the roles expected of them in adulthood. They learn the skills necessary for these roles and manage the demands of the labor market as well as meet family, community, and citizenship commitments.

Early adolescents are:

- Mostly interested in the present and near future.
- Likely to change vocational goals often.

Understanding Adolescence

a developmental lens

EARLY ADOLESCENCE	MIDDLE ADOLESCENCE	LATE ADOLESCENCE / EMERGING ADULTHOOD
10 – 14 Grades 5 – 9	15 – 17 Grades 9 - 12	18 – 24 Post high-school

Developmental tasks

- Adjust to new physical sense of self (including body image)
- Adjust to a sexually maturing body and feelings
- Develop and apply abstract thinking skills
- Define a personal sense of identity
- Adopt a personal value system
- Renegotiate relationship with parents/caregivers
- Develop stable and productive peer relationships
- Meet demands of increasingly mature roles and responsibilities

Tasks of Early Adolescence (ages 10 – 14 years)

This synthesis of adolescent development research was compiled by Kristin Teipel, 2012, revised by Katie Pierson, 2023, [State Adolescent Health Resource Center](#), University of Minnesota.

Adjust to new physical sense of self.

Adolescents experience rapid and profound physical changes that are driven by hormones acting on different parts of their bodies. In middle adolescence, they experience:

- Continuing physical and sexual changes.
- Concern with appearance and body.
- Feeling strange about self and body.
- Extremes in physical activity and lethargy.
- Increased appetite during growth spurts and decreased appetite between them.
- Increased need for sleep.

Adjust to a sexually maturing body and feelings

With the significant changes they experience in adolescence, youth must adapt sexually and establish a sense of sexual identity. This includes incorporating a personal sense of gender identity; establishing values about sexual behavior; and developing skills for romantic relationships. In middle adolescence, teens experience:

- Sexual drives.
- Interest in the possibility of dating and/or attracting a partner.
- Concerns about sexual attractiveness.
- Frequent changes in relationships.
- Feelings of love and passion.

Brain Development

By age 6 (on average), a young person’s brain is 95% of adult size. However, the brain continues to physically develop in the teen years and even into the 20s with a second growth spurt of gray matter (peaking at age 11 for girls and 12 for boys) followed by a “pruning” process in which connections among neurons in the brain that are not used wither away and those that are used remain.

The front part of the brain, responsible for functions such as complex reasoning, problem-solving, thinking ahead, prioritizing, long-term planning, self-evaluation and regulation of emotion, begins to develop in early adolescence with a final developmental push starting at age 16 or 17. It is not that these tasks cannot be done before young adulthood, but rather that it takes more effort and requires practice.

Physical growth & puberty		Assigned male at birth (AMAB)	Assigned female at birth (AFAB)
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Young people of all genders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enter puberty now at earlier ages than ever. ▪ Experience a wide range of “normal.” ▪ Experience physical maturation and cognitive development in stages that don’t always correlate to each other (e.g. youth that look physically older do not yet necessarily have higher levels of cognitive ability). 		

Develop and apply abstract thinking skills

Adolescents experience significant changes in their ability to think. They are increasingly able to understand and grapple with abstract ideas, think about possibilities, think ahead, think about thinking, and “put themselves in another person’s shoes.” This is a gradual process that spans adolescence and young adulthood. They are growing in their ability to think about themselves, others, and the world around them. Early in the process, youth are limited in their ability to hold more than one point of view – understanding something from one perspective but not another.

In middle adolescence, however:

- Teens experience growth in abstract thought; developing new skills, such as thinking more about possibilities, thinking more about the process of thinking itself, thinking in multiple dimensions, and seeing things as relative rather than absolute.
- Cause-effect relationships are better understood.
- Young people practice new thinking skills through humor and by arguing with parents and others.
- They revert to concrete thought under stress.

Define a personal sense of identity

Adolescents move from identifying themselves as an extension of their parents (childhood) to recognizing their uniqueness and separateness from parents. They develop a sense of self as an individual and as a person connected to valuable people and groups. They refine their sense of identity, exploring issues such as Who am I? How do I fit in? Am I loveable and loving? How am I competent?

This process often manifests as exploration of alternative styles of dress, jewelry, music, hair, and mannerisms. Teens may struggle to identify a true self amid seeming contradictions in the way they feel and behave in different situations, and with different levels of thought and understanding. Middle-stage adolescents:

- Attention to their own needs can

present as being self-absorbed.

- Can alternate between unrealistically high expectations and a poor self-concept.
- Are focused on examining their inner experiences (journaling, etc.).
- Can fluctuate between perceiving self as being intensely inadequate and perceiving self as totally invulnerable to negative events.

Adopt a personal values system

Adolescents develop a more complex understanding of moral behavior and underlying principles of justice. They question and assess beliefs from childhood and restructure these beliefs into a personal ideology (e.g. more personally meaningful values, religious views, and belief systems to guide decisions and behavior). In middle adolescence, they:

- Develop ideals and select role models.
- Develop an interest in moral reasoning.
- Are increasingly able to consider others’ perspectives into account.
- Begin to develop morals based on respect for the social order and agreements between people: "law and order" morality and desire for social approval.
- Question social conventions and re-examine personal values and moral/ethical principles, sometimes resulting in conflicts with parents.

Renegotiate relationship with parents/caregivers

Adolescents negotiate a change in relationships with parents that begins to balance autonomy (independence) with connection. Overall, the adolescent’s task is one of separating in some ways, while maintaining and redefining connections in others. Through this process, they make room for a more adult relationship that meets cultural expectations and provides necessary support. In middle adolescence, this differentiation presents as:

- Complaining that parents interfere with their independence.
- Conflicts with family (reflecting ambivalence about their own emerging independence).
- Periods of sadness as the psychological loss of parents takes place.

Develop stable and productive peer relationships

Peer relationships change during adolescence, giving youth with more support and connections as they spend less time with adults and in supervised activities. These peer relationships often compete with parents and schools in terms of their influence on teen’s attitudes and behaviors. As networks with peers broaden, peer relationships become deeper and play an increasing role in shaping an individual teen’s self-concept and interaction.

Adolescents experience three transformations in peer relationships:

1. Reorientation of friendships from activity- based relationships of childhood to more stable, affectively-oriented friendships based on idea and value sharing.
2. Growth of romantic and sexually oriented relationships.
3. Emergence of peer “crowds.”

Throughout adolescence, friendships become more stable, intimate and supportive; they provide a cornerstone for learning about adult relationships.

In middle adolescence, they:

- Prioritize their peer group. (These strong peer alliances can show up as fad behaviors.)
- Show increasing interest and involvement in romantic relationships and friendships.
- Increasingly label or group their peers (e.g. cliques).

Meet demands of increasing mature roles and responsibilities

Adolescents gradually take on the roles expected of them in adulthood. They learn the skills necessary for these roles and manage the demands of the labor market as well as meet family, community and citizenship commitments. In middle adolescence:

- Intellectual interests gain importance.
- Teens have greater capacity for setting goals.
- Having a part-time job is common.

This is a time of life when very little is normative. It is a period of frequent change and exploration for older adolescents in many aspects of life, including home, family, work, school, resources, and role. The process of becoming an adult is more gradual and varied today than in the past. Young people take longer to achieve economic and psychological autonomy and early adulthood experiences vary greatly by gender, race and ethnicity, and social class.

Adjust to new physical sense of self.

Physical and sexual body changes in late adolescence /young adulthood are mostly complete.

- Individuals assigned male at birth (AMAB) may continue growing physically until age 21.
- All genders tend to experience increasing acceptance of physical appearance.

Adjust to a sexually maturing body and feelings

In adolescence, youth establish a sense of sexual and gender identity. This includes deciding on values about sexual behavior and developing skills for romantic relationships. By young adulthood:

- Young people tend to have a clear sexual and gender identity.
- They consider serious relationships and their potential for emotional and physical intimacy (What kind of person am I? What kind of person would suit me best as a partner?).
- Serious intimate relationships begin to develop. A majority of young adults regard love, fidelity and lifelong commitment as very important to a successful relationship.
- Most are sexually experienced.

Develop and apply abstract thinking skills

Adolescents experience significant changes in their capacity to think. Throughout adolescence, they become increasingly able to understand and grapple with abstract ideas, think about possibilities, think ahead, think about thinking, and “put themselves in another person’s shoes.” In other words, they become more sophisticated in their ability to think about themselves, others, and the world around them. This is a gradual process. In young adulthood:

- The capacity for abstract thought is established. Now, the individual can think abstractly and hypothetically; discern the underlying principles, and apply them to new situations. They can think about the future, considering many possibilities and logical outcomes of possible events.

The range of “normal” for a young adult is broad in terms of:

- Where they live;
- Who they live with;
- School and labor force participation;
- Parenting status;
- Relationships with own parents;
- Romantic relationship status;
- Community participation (connection to institutions and systems).

- Young people can hold and manipulate clusters of abstract ideas and create systems for organizing abstract thoughts.
- They have greater ability to consider different points of view at the same time, which can result in increased empathy and concern for others, and new interest in societal issues. It also allows youth to value a diversity of people (and their perspectives) and appreciate that there may be many right answers to a problem.
- Young people at this age are philosophical and idealistic.

Define a personal sense of identity

Adolescents move from identifying themselves as an extension of their parents (childhood) to recognizing their uniqueness and separateness from parents. They develop a sense of self as an individual and as a person connected to valuable people and groups. They refine their sense of identity around issues such as gender, physical attributes, sexuality, ethnicity. They explore issues such as Who am I? How do I fit in? Am I loveable and loving? How am I competent? This process often manifests as exploration of styles of dress, jewelry, music, hair, manner, and lifestyle. By late adolescence (young adulthood):

- Young people have a firmer sense of identity, although this is still a time of identity exploration (especially in areas of personal relationships, education, work, family).
- Many feel “in-between,” – seeing themselves as neither an adolescent nor an adult.

Brain Development

By age 6 (on average), a young person’s brain is 95% of adult size. However, the brain continues to physically develop in the teen years and even into the 20s with a second growth spurt of gray matter (peaking at age 11 for girls and 12 for boys) followed by a “pruning” process in which connections among neurons in the brain that are not used wither away and those that are used remain.

The front part of the brain, responsible for functions such as complex reasoning, problem- solving, thinking ahead, prioritizing, long-term planning, self-evaluation and regulation of emotion, begins to develop in early adolescence with a final developmental push starting at age 16 or 17. ***It is not that these tasks cannot be done before young adulthood, but rather that it takes more effort and requires practice.***

Adopt a personal value system

Adolescents develop a more complex understanding of moral behavior and underlying principles of justice. They question and assess beliefs from childhood and restructure these beliefs into a personal ideology (e.g. more personally meaningful values, religious views, and belief systems to guide decisions and behavior). Young adults:

- Experience less influence from their peers on their decision-making and values.
- Can see multiple viewpoints, value a diversity of people and perspectives and appreciate that there can be many right answers to a problem.
- Identify values and viewpoints that work for themselves while respecting viewpoints/values of others.

Renegotiate relationship with parents/caregivers

Adolescents negotiate a change in relationship with parents that begins to balance autonomy (independence) with connection. Overall, the adolescent's task is one of separating in some ways, while maintaining and redefining connections in others. Through this process, they make room for a more adult relationship that meets cultural expectations and provides necessary support.

In young adulthood, this presents as:

- An improved ability to see parents as individuals and take their perspectives into account.
- Having conflicts with parents with decreasing frequency as young people age.
- Renegotiating parent-child roles, especially for those who live at home (nearly half of all U.S. young adults in their late teens and early twenties still live with their parents). This is important as rates of residential change is highest in late adolescence/young adulthood than any other age group (young people living at home, moving out and living independently or with peers/partners, moving back home, etc).

Develop stable and productive peer relationships

Peer relationships change during adolescence to provide youth with more support and connections as they spend less time with adults and in supervised activity. Peer relationships often compete with parents and schools in terms of their influence on teen's attitudes and behaviors. As networks with peers broaden, peer relationships become deeper and play an increasing role in shaping an individual teen's self-concept and interaction.

Throughout adolescence, young people experience three transformations in peer relationships:

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3. Emergence of peer "crowds."

Throughout adolescence, friendships become more stable, intimate and supportive; they provide a cornerstone for learning about adult relationships.

In young adulthood, adolescents:

- Relate more to individual peers than to their peer group.
- Have more mature styles of peer relationships (stability, intimacy and supportiveness).
- Increasingly strike a balance between the influences of family and peers.

Meet demands of increasing mature roles and responsibilities

Young adults gradually take on the roles expected of them in adulthood. They learn the skills necessary for these roles and manage the demands of the labor market as well as meet family, community, and citizenship commitments.

Young adults have:

- Stable interests.
- An ability to compromise.
- Self-reliance.
- Greater concern for others.
- Higher levels of concern for the future.
- Thoughts about their specific role in life.
- Non-linear transitions to work, college, and independent living, frequently combined with work and periods of non-attendance in school.
- Tend to have difficulty adhering to an orderly and predictable sequence of education, full-time employment, home-leaving, cohabitation or marriage, and parenthood when growing up in less resourced neighborhoods.
- More focus on making their work experiences a foundation for their adult occupation.

Understanding Adolescence a developmental lens

EARLY ADOLESCENCE	MIDDLE ADOLESCENCE	LATE ADOLESCENCE / EMERGING ADULTHOOD
10 – 14 Grades 5 – 9	15 – 17 Grades 9 - 12	18 – 24 Post high-school

Developmental tasks

Adjust to new physical sense of self (including body image)

Adjust to a sexually maturing body and feelings

Develop and apply abstract thinking skills

Define a personal sense of identity

Adopt a personal value system

Renegotiate relationship with parents/caregivers

Develop stable and productive peer relationships

Meet demands of increasingly mature roles and responsibilities

Tasks of Late Adolescence (ages 18-24 years)

This synthesis of adolescent development research was compiled by Kristin Teipel, 2012, revised by Katie Pierson, 2023, [State Adolescent Health Resource Center](#), University