

Strong Bonds Fact Sheet: Parents : Adolescent Development

Adolescence can be a challenging time. Young people go through huge changes physically and emotionally. It can help if parents understand the behaviour and reactions they can expect from their children in these years.

Growing from Child to Adult: Adolescence

In many countries young people are regarded as adults as soon as they have reached puberty. They start work, may marry and have children themselves.

They move straight from childhood into adult roles and take on the same sorts of responsibilities their parents carry.

Western thinking

In *western society* people believe that children still need several years after puberty begins, to grow fully into adulthood.

We call this period of time between puberty and adulthood '*adolescence*'.

Only after adolescence are young people seen as being ready to take on full-time work, live independently and have children.

The adolescent years

A general guide to the current view of adolescent stages in western culture is:

- Early adolescence occurs between 10 to 14 years.
- Middle adolescence occurs between 15 to 18 years.
- Late adolescence occurs between 19 to 24 years.

Until recently most people thought that adolescence ended at age 18, when most young people finished secondary school.

Now young people are living with their parents longer while they attend university or TAFE colleges. They are dependent on their parents financially for more years than in the past.

So the end of adolescence is now thought to be when a young person reaches their mid-twenties.

Dealing with body changes

Physical growth is one of the biggest changes in the teenage years. But there are also huge changes in ways of thinking, relationships and sense of identity.

- Adolescents can sometimes be difficult to live with because of the emotional and hormonal changes they are going through.
- They become more concerned about how they look, what they say what other people think of them.
- They seek their parent's approval less and want the approval of their friends more.

Learning to live with body changes

Adolescents often become shy or private about their bodies as they begin to notice how much their body is changing.

They start to find out about sex and may want to experiment with expressing feelings through their bodies.

Importance of friendships

Friendships become more important for adolescents. Some teenagers want to spend all their time with friends. They text their friends or talk on the phone or computer to them for hours at night even when they have seen them all day.

They want to spend less time with parents and family. They are:

- Trying to be more independent.
- Looking for new experiences.
- Trying out new identities.

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Trying new things

Young people like to experiment. They are thinking about who they are, and who they want to be. They are trying to find their own identity.

They will often try:

- New hair styles and clothes.
- Different music.
- New activities instead of the old ones they used to like.
- Going out a lot more.
- Finding new friends.

Risk taking

Some activities teenagers try out may be risky or dangerous such as:

- Drug and alcohol use.
- Breaking the law – crime.
- Unsafe sex.
- Train-surfing.

Talk to your child about keeping safe.

Remember also your own behaviour has a powerful influence on your children.

If you are drinking heavily or using drugs or someone in your family is breaking the law, then your child is more likely to think this is ok for them too.

Thinking for themselves

Adolescents start to have their own ideas and opinions. They may not be the same as yours. They may disagree with you a lot and get angry with you sometimes.

Some parents are shocked when their child speaks their own mind and disagrees with them. But your child is learning to think for themselves.

In western society this is accepted as a normal part of adolescent development.

Shutting parents out

Strong feelings and mood swings are common in adolescence. When your children were little, they came to you for comfort or help when things were difficult.

Now they may try to deal with these feelings by themselves, or turn to their friends for support. It can

be hard for parents when they feel shut out and unable to help.

Anger

During adolescence some young people get angry often. Anger is OK sometimes. It can be healthy and helps let you know when something is not right. It can also make us feel stronger so that we can make difficult decisions and put them into action.

But anger needs to come out in a safe way, without violence.

If your teenager is using violence, then you need to take steps to try to help them control their anger. (see **Dealing with Violence**).

Changing relationships with parents

Young people are learning to be more independent. Many family rules no longer make sense to them. Your child may still accept some help and advice from family, but this will get less as they grow older.

But strong family relationships are still very important for young people.

Sometimes it looks like the young person doesn't care for their family at all. But this isn't true. Knowing they have family support helps. They still need to know you care.

→ Related Fact Sheets

- [Dealing with Conflict](#)
- [Dealing with Violence](#)

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→ Tips from this Fact Sheet

- In western society people believe that children still need several years after puberty begins, to grow fully into adulthood. We call this period of time between puberty and adulthood 'adolescence'.
- Parents may be more understanding and cope better if they know what changes to expect in a young person's moods and behaviour during adolescence.
- As young people learn to think for themselves, they may disagree with their parents' ideas and ways of doing things.
- Strong family relationships are still very important for young people. They need to know you care, even if they are behaving badly.

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