



UNDERSTANDING ADOLESCENCE

Assisting young people to develop into independent and mature young adults can be very rewarding for carers. It can also be a very challenging time as young people test boundaries and push for new freedoms.

Good communication will be critical to your relationship with your young person during this time.

Understanding Changes

Adolescent Development

Caring for young people through adolescent development can seem like a roller-coaster ride at times.



It is a time of many firsts – making new friendship groups, starting high school, learning to drive, and even starting new relationships. Young people are learning to form their own unique identities, values and ideals.

It is normal for young people to have many ups and downs during this time which may cause you to feel worn down or frustrated at times, or even fear for their safety as they begin taking more risks and trying new things.

Physical Changes

Apart from infancy adolescence is the time when young people experience the most physical growth. During this growth spurt the teenager you care for can grow up to 10cm a year and their heart will double in size!

The growth spurts can begin as early as nine, or sometimes as late as sixteen as the levels of three types of hormones rapidly increase (gonadotropins, gonadal steroids and adrenal androgens). With physical changes occurring at such a rapid rate it is only natural that you will also notice a number of other changes.

Social Changes

Adolescence is a time of significant social and emotional development and can look very different for each child. Your young person's development can be affected by their environment, experiences, genes, brain development, culture and community. They are also often dealing with complex social issues, such as sexuality, relationship problems, or alcohol and drug use. It is not unusual to notice changes in the way your young person interacts with others, including their family and significant adults in their life. It can therefore be difficult to know what to expect and how best to support your young person.

Remember: Physical and emotional changes are happening incredibly fast and can be very confusing for your young person.

You might notice your young person:

- Trying to work out who they are and where they fit into the world.
- Looking for independence.
- Searching for more responsibility.
- Becoming more easily influenced by friends than in the past, particularly when it comes to behaviour and sense of self.
- Starting to develop a stronger set of values and thinking more about 'right' and 'wrong' – this may include questioning more things.
- Wanting to engage in new experiences and/or risk-taking behaviour. Keep in mind that they are still learning how to control their impulses.
- Developing and exploring sexual identity (this may or not may not include intimate relationships).
- Communicating differently, such as using the internet, mobile phones and social media.

Emotional Changes

As well as observing physical and behaviour changes you may notice:

- Moods may seem intense and unpredictable as your young person's brain has not yet learnt to control or express emotions in mature ways. This often leads to increased conflict at home and tends to peak in early adolescence.
- Young people may be more sensitive to your emotions as they are learning to read (and sometimes misread!) facial expressions and body language.
- Self-esteem is often affected by your young person's perception of how they look, and how they might compare to friends and peers. Physical appearance and changes can significantly impact their sense of self at this time.
- Teenagers may go through a period of feeling 'bullet-proof' as they are yet to learn about the realistic consequences of their actions.

It is normal for young people to feel confused, sad, angry, worried and frustrated at times. Sometimes the causes may seem unclear. Your young person may appear tearful or sad, feel worthless, lack energy or motivation, have poor concentration, eat less or more, have difficulty sleeping, lack interest in things or say that they feel alone. If you recognise a number of these things in your young person they may benefit from extra support. Contact Time for Kids for more information.

It is not unusual for relationships to go through dramatic changes through adolescence. Maintaining strong relationships with people who are positive and familiar to them will be critical for your young person's positive development. You can help by being available to your young person when they need someone to talk to and helping them through their problems. Rather than feeling 'happy all the time', teach them that learning to cope with negative feelings is an important life skill.

Remember: adult role models such as carers and mentors are likely to influence long-term decisions, such as career choices, values and morals while peers will more likely influence things like appearance and interests.

Show An Interest

Showing interest in the things that are important to your young person allows them to feel valued and shows that you appreciate what they know.

- Ask for advice. Young people love sharing their knowledge, especially about things that interest them such as popular culture and technology. Let them teach you!

- Talk with them about the music and television shows they like.
- Watch and support them playing sports or other activities.

Friendship groups are important to young people so they have people to turn to for support when they need it.

Showing an interest in their friends is a great way of showing that you also support them.

Demonstrate Love And Care

We all need to hear and see that we are loved and cared for, especially young people.

You might like to try:

- Having their favourite food in the house shows that you care about their feelings and are thinking of them in between visits.
- Creating a poster with them of your time together, friends and family, or positive achievements in their life.
- Telling them you care about them and offer hugs (or high fives) if they are comfortable with this.
- Being flexible if plans change (within reason).
- Letting them know you are proud of them.

Time for Kids' carer resources are available to download from www.timeforkids.com.au.

To discuss any issues raised in this resource, please call us on 8440 8500.

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