

# INFORMATION PACKET:

## Normal Adolescent Development

Updated July 2023

### *CREDITS:*

**Parenting: Preparing for Adolescence** (Facts for Families No. 56 Updated December 2017, Reviewed May 2022), American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)

[https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/FFF-Guide/Parenting-Preparing-For-Adolescence-056.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Parenting-Preparing-For-Adolescence-056.aspx)

**Adolescent Development Part 1** (Facts for Families No. 57 Updated December 2017, Reviewed May 2022), American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)

[https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/FFF-Guide/Normal-Adolescent-Development-Part-I-057.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Normal-Adolescent-Development-Part-I-057.aspx)

**Adolescent Development Part 2** (Facts for Families No. 58 Updated December 2017, Reviewed May 2022), American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)

[https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/FFF-Guide/Normal-Adolescent-Development-Part-II-058.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Normal-Adolescent-Development-Part-II-058.aspx)

**Normal Teenage Behavior vs. Signs of Mental Illness** (May 24, 2018), Paradigm Treatment

<https://paradigm-treatment.com/normal-teenage-behavior-mental-illness/>

The following packet contains information on the above topic. If you wish to receive training credit for reading this packet, please fill out the “Information Packet Questionnaire” at the back of this packet. Return the completed questionnaire to the Alaska Center for Resource Families for 1.0 training credit. The articles are yours to keep for further reference.

For more information about this topic or other topics related to foster care, please contact:

Alaska Center for Resource Families  
815 Second Ave Suite 202  
Fairbanks, AK 99701

1-800-478-7307  
479-7307 (Fairbanks/North Pole)/279-1799 (Anchorage)

[www.acrf.org](http://www.acrf.org)



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# Parenting: Preparing For Adolescence

AACAP



Parenting: Preparing For Adolescence

No. 56; December 2017

Parenting can be the most rewarding work of adult life. Nothing brings more joy and pride than a happy, productive, and loving child. Each age and stage of a child's development has specific goals and tasks. For infants, it is to eat, sleep, and explore their world. For adolescents, it is to become their own person with their own group of friends. Adolescents need many skills in order to successfully achieve their goal of increased independence. Some adolescents do not make this transition smoothly. Their movement toward independence can cause stress and grief for parents and families. Some aspects of this rough transition are normal and, while stressful, should not alarm parents.

**Starting early is the best way for parents to prepare for their child's adolescence.** The following are ways that parents can prepare themselves and their child for a smoother transition and greater success in achieving the tasks of adolescent development:

Providing a stable, safe and loving home environment

Creating an atmosphere of honesty, mutual trust, and respect

Creating a culture of open communication at family meal times

Allowing age appropriate independence and assertiveness

Developing a relationship that encourages your child to talk to you

Teaching responsibility for their belongings and yours

Teaching basic responsibility for household chores

Teaching the importance of accepting limits

Teaching the importance of thinking before acting

These are complex processes which occur gradually and start during infancy. A teenager's adolescent years will be less stressful when parents and child have worked together on these tasks throughout the child's earlier development.

The ability to talk openly about problems is one of the most important aspects of the parent and child relationship. Developing this relationship and open communication takes time, persistence, and understanding. The relationship develops gradually by spending time with the teen. One challenge is finding quality, not rushed time for parents to spend with their adolescents; as schedules with afterschool activities, sports and jobs become busy during adolescent. Family meal times, sharing stories of parents' adolescence, playing board games, outings, vacations, and celebrations are important opportunities for parents to spend time with their adolescent. Parents should also try to spend some individual time with each child, praising positive behaviors and talking about difficult or upsetting things. This relationship creates the foundation for talking with the child when struggles and conflicts emerge during adolescence.

A parent-child relationship which is very stressful or troubled during the preadolescent years can be a strong signal that professional help may be needed. Parents' investment of time and energy in the child's early years can prevent small problems of childhood from becoming larger problems of adolescence.



# Adolescent Development Part 1

No. 57; December 2017

## 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. The brain continues to develop throughout adolescence with the potential for positive changes.

### Movement Towards Independence

- Struggle with sense of identity
- Feeling awkward or strange about one's self and one's body
- Often an increased focus on self, alternating between high expectations and poor self-esteem
- Interests and clothing style influenced by peer group
- Moodiness
- Improved ability to use speech to express one's self
- 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
- Learning to drive and share family automobiles
- Tendency to return to childish behavior, particularly when stressed
- Resistance to following their parents' belief system or cultural traditions, especially if these is different from what they see in their community.

### Future Interests and Cognitive Changes

- Mostly interested in present, with limited thoughts of the future
- Intellectual interests expand and gain in importance
- Greater ability to do work (physical, mental, emotional)

### Sexuality

- Display shyness, blushing, and modesty
- Girls develop physically sooner than boys
- Increased interest in sex; this can be with the opposite, the same sex, or either
- 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; beginning to understand the potential consequences of future behaviors
- Development of ideals and selection of role models
- Experimentation with sex and drugs (cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana)

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



# Adolescent Development Part II

No. 58; December 2017

## Late High School Years and Beyond

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 late high school adolescent are described below. The brain continues to develop throughout later adolescence.

### Movement towards Independence

- Increased independent functioning
- Firmer and more cohesive sense of identity
- Examination of inner experiences
- Ability to think ideas through
- Conflict with parents begins to decrease
- Increased ability for delayed gratification and compromise
- Increased emotional stability
- Increased concern for others
- Increased self-reliance
- Peer relationships remain important and take an appropriate place among other interests
- Firmer religious and cultural belief system which may be different from their parents and family

### Future Interests and Cognitive Changes

- Work habits become more defined
- Increased concern for the future and life beyond high school
- More importance is placed on one's role in life

### Sexuality

- Feelings of love and passion
- Development of more serious relationships
- Firmer sense of sexual identity
- Increased capacity for tender and sensual love

### Morals, Values, and Self-Direction

- Greater capacity for setting goals
- Capacity to use insight
- Increased emphasis on personal dignity and self-esteem
- Family, social and cultural traditions regain some of their previous importance

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





## Normal Teenage Behavior vs. Signs of Mental Illness

May 24, 2018

Adolescence: It's a time rife with hormonal surges, big decisions, and an intense desire (and need) to break away from the role of a child. Many parents notice that their kids are moody, impulsive, and sleeping at different times than they used to. For most teens, these are normal parts of growing up. For others, however, they could be the [early signs of mental health conditions](#) such as anxiety, depression, and bipolar disorder.

How can you tell the difference? Here's a guide to normal teenage behavior vs. signs of mental illness. As always, however, if you have questions or concerns about your adolescent's development, it's important to consult with a physician.

### Mood Swings, Anger, and Irritability

Mood swings are common during the pre-teen and teen years. Girls are more likely to vacillate between happy and sad, and boys are more likely to swing from happy to angry, but teens of both sexes can experience a wide range of emotions in a day; in some cases, they can swing from positive to negative emotions in an hour or even in minutes! How do you know whether your teen's moodiness is normal teenage behavior or a potential mental health issue?

One way to tell the difference is the intensity of the emotions. If your teen is quick to tear up or get irritated over what you consider nothing worth crying or complaining about, that's likely par for the course of adolescence. If, however, your child is excessively angry or destructive, that's not normal. Neither are long periods of intense sadness or hopelessness. While positive emotions don't usually cause alarm in parents, you should be aware of any [manic behavior](#), particularly if it's followed by a period of depression.

### Impulsive, Risky Behaviors

A teen's frontal cortex is [not fully formed](#), and this can be frustrating for teens and adults alike. A teen often underestimates risks and overestimates his or her abilities. Teens often act impulsively, not pausing to think about the risks and benefits of various behaviors. Many teens believe that they are invincible and that "it won't happen to me," whether "it" is a car accident, a teenage pregnancy, or getting caught doing something illegal or dangerous. Teens can often feed off of each other's dares and challenges, as evidenced by the recent [Tide Pod Challenge](#) that made its way through social media.

Some of this is normal teenage behavior. Talking to your child about making good choices and giving him or her gradually increasing levels of responsibility can help them get through this time. If your teen is very impulsive, however, and isn't able to control his or her reckless behavior, that is a potential mental health red flag. Getting arrested, getting into more than one minor car accident, and being caught driving under the influence of a substance are all behaviors that warrant concern.

## Differences in Appetite and Weight

As your teen finishes growing, he or she might put on weight in different places. “Baby fat” tends to dissipate during the early teen years. Some teens will become overweight due to diet, a lack of activity, health issues, or [etics](#). Many teens are concerned by these changes. Some will develop [eating disorders](#), first in an effort to [trol](#) weight, and then because they cannot control the mental processes that allow this type of disorder to continue. Know the signs of anorexia and bulimia, and be on the watch for any symptoms that you can see in your teen.

Anxiety and depression can also cause weight fluctuations that aren’t related to normal development or an eating disorder. A teen suffering from these mental health conditions might have no appetite at all and might lose weight. Other teens with these illnesses might overeat, leading to weight gain. Changes in weight can also lead to poor self-esteem. It’s not uncommon for a teen with depression to overeat and gain weight, then develop an eating disorder. If you are concerned about your teen’s weight or eating patterns, consult his or her physician.

## Differences in Sleeping Patterns

You might have noticed when your teen entered adolescence that he or she wanted to stay up very late and sleep in. On weekends and during school breaks, this is normal teenage behavior. A teen’s [circadian rhythm changes](#) during the pre-teen and teen years, and they naturally find it more difficult to go to bed early. Another factor is that many teens are using smartphones and tablets late at night; the [blue light](#) emitted by these devices can interfere with melatonin production, causing insomnia. These issues can often be solved by removing the devices from their bedrooms after a specific time at night.

If your teen is having sleep disturbances and isn’t sleeping much at all, however, there might be a problem at play. For example, a teen with anxiety might not be able to wind down easily. Another issue is that [depression](#) can cause a teen to sleep many more hours than the typical teen needs; the lack of energy and overwhelming fatigue can cause a teen to stay in bed most of the day, even to the point of making it impossible for them to attend school. These problems should be addressed by a physician or mental health professional.

## Teenage Apathy and Boredom

Many parents lament that their teens are bored and not interested in doing anything. If the issue is that they’re more interested in playing video games, listening to music, and texting with their friends than they are in doing schoolwork or getting a job, then it is likely just a case of teens being teens. If, however, your teenager has lost interest in the friends, activities, and interests that they used to enjoy, there could be a larger underlying problem, such as depression or substance abuse. Talk to your teen to find out if there is an issue that needs to be addressed.

## Conclusion

Parenting a teen isn’t easy, and it can be difficult to determine whether annoying, troubling, or frustrating behaviors are par for the course or a red flag. One tip for deciphering signs of mental illness from normal teenage behavior is to keep communication open with your teen. With an open line of communication, your teen will feel comfortable opening up to you about what’s going on in their life and how they are feeling. If you suspect that your teen might be suffering from a mental health disorder, the next step is to consult with a mental health specialist

Posted in [Mental Health](#)

# INFORMATION PACKET QUESTIONNAIRE

## Normal Adolescent Development

1.0 Credit

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_

*Only one person per questionnaire. Feel free to make additional copies if needed.*

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Street or Post Office City/State Zip*

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ **YES! I would like to receive ACRF email.** *(Includes Training Tracks Newsletter, training reminders and community events or training of interest for Resource Families)*

Are you a foster parent? ☐ YES ☐ NO If YES, what is your Foster Home License #: \_\_\_\_\_

If NO, please check one: ☐ Pending Foster Parent ☐ OCS ☐ Birth Parent ☐ Adoptive Parent

☐ Residential Treatment Facility (License #: \_\_\_\_\_) ☐ Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Other *(please specify)*: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please read the information packet. Then fill out this questionnaire and RETURN TO: ACRF, 815 Second Avenue Suite 202, Fairbanks, AK 99701. Or email to [acrif@nwresource.org](mailto:acrif@nwresource.org) or fax it to: 907-479-9666.*

1. This information packet presents concepts and ideas that may be useful to your foster parenting experience. Please list two (2) specific ideas or concepts that you learned or reaffirmed from reading this booklet. Write a short sentence or two describing how you can use them in your family.

a)

b)

*Please see reverse side*

# **INFORMATION PACKET QUESTIONNAIRE**

2. List each title in this packet. In a few sentences, summarize the main purpose or key points for each section in this booklet:



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