

Points for Parents

...about teenage growth and development

Ages 15-17

Note: The Guidance Department thought this information, provided to us in part by the American Medical Association, would be of interest to parents of our students.

Physical Growth

Girls usually reach full physical development by this age. Many teenage girls are concerned with the way they look and are dissatisfied with their bodies and their weight; nearly half of all high school girls diet to lose weight. Boys are close to completing their physical growth, and around 15 or 16 years of age their voices lower and facial hair appears. Boys may continue to gain height and muscle after age 17.

Intellectual Characteristics

Teens in this age range are better able to solve problems, think about their future, appreciate opinions of others and understand the long-term effects of their decisions. However, teens tend to use these skills inconsistently; as a result, they sometimes do things without thinking first.

Teens' organizational skills improve. Many successfully juggle school, outside activities and work.

In an attempt to answer the questions "Who am I?" teens listen to new music, try out clothing fashions and begin to explore jobs, religion, political issues and social causes.

Teens frequently question and challenge school and parental rules.

Social and Emotional Characteristics

Older teens are more self-assured and better able to resist peer pressure than younger teens. They spend less time with their families, preferring to spend time with friends or be alone. They try to make close friends and may become part of a group based on interests or attributes (sports, arts, etc.)

Teens want control over more aspects of their lives at this time. They are at the same time excited and overwhelmed by the possibilities for their future: college, work or military. Like adults, they get depressed, but sadness lasting more than two weeks is not normal. Parents should call their child's doctor if this happens.

Use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs may be more prevalent at this age than before. Additionally, teens begin to have strong sexual urges and may become sexually active. They become more aware of their own sexual orientation.

Tips for Parents

1. Breaking away from parents or guardians and wanting more privacy are normal parts of growing up. Parents should not take this personally.

2. Although they won't admit it, teens still need their parents to set limits. Rules and privileges such as curfew, driving and dating, should be based on your teen's level of maturity, not age.
3. Negotiate rules with your son or daughter. The more controlling you try to be, the more rebellious your teen is likely to become.
4. Discuss the consequences of breaking rules and follow through with those consequences if your teen misbehaves.
5. Teens make mistakes and lose their parents' trust. It is important, though, for you to give them another chance.
6. Express your values about school, work, alcohol and other drugs, and sex.
7. Encourage your child to talk to his/her guidance counselor about the future after high school. The department has aptitude and interest inventories that can help.
8. In your teen tells you s/he is homosexual, s/he will need your love and support. Be glad your child trusts you enough to tell you this. You in turn may benefit from a support group for parents of gay and lesbian youth.
9. Know how to recognize the signs and symptoms of eating disorders and other mental health problems. Deal with any problem right away. Resources follow this list.
10. Talk with your son/daughter about ways to handle pressure to drink, smoke, engage in sex, etc. Teach your teen how to say no, to instead suggest doing something different that is safe. To feel comfortable talking openly with you, your child needs to know you will not punish him or her for being honest.

Resources

Your child's physician or health care provider.

Adolescent Health On-Line

<http://www.ama-assn.org/adolhlth.htm> (See "Adolescent Health Links: Parenting Resources)

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

<http://www.aacap.org>

Parents Place

<http://www.parentsplace.com/shopping/tnpc/parentalk>

National Eating Disorders Association

<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>

Alcoholics Anonymous

<http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org>

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

<http://www.pflag.org>