

# Normal Adolescent Development

by Family Education Staff

## **Introduction**

Each teenager is an individual with a unique personality and special interests, likes, and dislikes. In general, however, there is a series of developmental tasks that everyone faces during the adolescent years.

A teenager's development can be divided into three stages -- early, middle, and late adolescence. The normal feelings and behaviors of adolescents for each stage are described below.

## **12-14 years**

### **Movement Toward Independence**

- Struggle with sense of identity
- Moodiness
- Improved abilities to use speech to express oneself
- More likely to express feelings by action than by words
- Close friendships gain importance
- Less attention shown to parents, with occasional rudeness
- Realization that parents are not perfect; identification of their faults
- Search for new people to love in addition to parents
- Tendency to return to childish behavior
- Peer group influences interests and clothing styles
- Increasing career interests
- Mostly interested in present and near future
- Greater ability to work

### **Sexuality**

- Girls ahead of boys
- Shyness, blushing, and modesty
- More showing off
- Greater interest in privacy
- Experimentation with body (masturbation)
- Worries about being normal

### **Ethics and Self-Direction**

- Rule and limit testing
- Occasional experimentation with cigarettes, marijuana, and alcohol
- Capacity for abstract thought

## **15-16 years**

### **Movement Toward Independence**

- Self-involvement, alternating between unrealistically high expectations and poor self-concept
- Complaints that parents interfere with independence
- Extremely concerned with appearance and with one's own body
- Feelings of strangeness about one's self and body
- Lowered opinion of parents, withdrawal from them
- Effort to make new friends
- Strong emphasis on the new peer group
- Periods of sadness as the psychological loss of the parents takes place
- Examination of inner experiences, which may include writing a diary

### **Career Interests**

- Intellectual interests gain importance
- Some sexual and aggressive energies directed into creative and career interests

### **Sexuality**

- Concerns about sexual attractiveness
- Frequently changing relationships
- Movement towards heterosexuality with fears of homosexuality
- Tenderness and fears shown toward opposite sex
- Feelings of love and passion

### **Ethics and Self-Description**

- Development of ideals and selection of role models
- More consistent evidence of conscience
- Greater capacity for setting goals
- Interest in moral reasoning

## **17-19 years**

### **Movement Toward Independence**

- Firmer identity
- Ability to delay gratification
- Ability to think ideas through
- Ability to express ideas in words
- More developed sense of humor
- Stable interests
- Greater emotional stability
- Ability to make independent decisions
- Ability to compromise
- Pride in one's work
- Self-reliance
- Greater concern for others

### **Career Interests**

- More defined work habits
- Higher level of concern for the future
- Thoughts about one's role in life

### **Sexuality**

- Concerned with serious relationships
- Clear sexual identity
- Capacities for tender and sensual love

### **Ethics and Self-Direction**

- Capable of useful insight
- Stress on personal dignity and self-esteem
- Ability to set goals and follow through
- Acceptance of social institutions and cultural traditions
- Self-regulation of self esteem

### **Conclusion**

Teenagers will naturally vary slightly from these descriptions, but the feelings and behaviors listed for each area are, in general, considered normal for each of the three stages. The mental and emotional problems that can interfere with these normal developmental stages are treatable.

If your teenager seems dramatically different from the descriptions presented here, it may be appropriate to consult with a mental health professional.

**Brought to you by the American School Counselor Association**