

The Changes of Adolescence

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Adolescence brings with it many changes for families. Previously considerate, obedient children who held your hand in public suddenly change into opinionated individuals who would rather write a 10 page essay than be seen in public with their parents.

Adolescence is the bridge between childhood and adulthood. It is a necessary and important stage for children to go through in order to develop into healthy, independent, responsible adults. While teenagers want more freedom, they also need more guidance. Adolescents today are faced with greater challenges at younger ages than ever before. The goal is to teach them to make healthy choices. They can best do this by being given opportunities to exercise their judgment – with a safety net. But how can parents discern “normal adolescent behavior” from behavior which indicates that outside help may be needed? Following are some guidelines.

Normal Behavior	Warning Signs
Wanting to spend more time with friends	Being completely non-communicative Not sharing any information about school or friends Isolating in his/her room
Challenging previously held beliefs and questioning household rules	Refusing to follow any of the house rules
Trying different clothing and hair styles Following fashion trends Moving to more “extreme” tastes in music	Showing a drastic personality change
Some changes in mood due to hormone surges	Any behavior that results in violent acts Being unable to cope with even a minor disappointment

Furthermore, parents should be concerned and seek outside help if their teenager shows any of the following:

- Experimentation with drugs (including alcohol)
- Sudden and severe drop in grades
- Reports of being harassed or bullied
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Violent or abusive behavior
- Any evidence of self harm or self injury

Parents should immediately seek help if an adolescent mentions suicide or wanting to die, gives away their possessions, or writes a will.

Adolescence can be a tough time, but it can also be a rewarding time, for parents and their children. By knowing when to get outside help and when to let your adolescent “grow” you can help them through this stage of development.