

Adolescence and the Challenges for Parents

Are you experiencing frustration, sometimes despair that you may have lost your cuddly, tiny, dependent child finding they have reached adolescence and becomedifferent.....loved and wonderful just the same, but perhaps more argumentative, distracted by friends, distant, moody and so on? It's easy to put the changes in behaviour down to raging hormones and though hormones play a role, it is the massive brain changes which is driving the behaviour. Let's look at what teens need you to know to help with understanding these changes.

They don't want to disconnect from you. What you think and the way you see them is really important. The fight or flight response is easily triggered (the amygdala) and that's because the pre-frontal cortex is still developing (which will take on average until the age of 25 to fully develop). This is the part of the brain that considers consequences, plans, controls impulses and is able to think logically and rationally. To read more about this go to <http://www.heysigmund.com/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-adolescent-brain/>

1. Setting boundaries remains really important. When you have to say, "No," say it in a way that shows you understand how important what was being asked for is to them. He/she needs to know you get it, ask questions, show interest, deliver your decision calmly.
2. It's a teen's job to experiment with who they are and how they fit in. Try not to shut down your teen when you don't agree; be curious and learn more about their point of view. This is a respectful way and will help them to understand yours! They are experimenting with being adults and love you as much as ever, but are experimenting with needing you less. Expect to feel a little distant from your teen as they try needing you less. The distance isn't because you don't matter anymore, it's because they need to know who they are without you. Don't take it personally even when it feels you are being pushed away; your child is finding out who they are and what it is like without you as close by as you have been - be patient, they will come back! It will seem as if the terms are being set by your teen. They have an uncanny way of making you feel this way. Be there when they need you, but understand that there will be a lot they will want to figure out without you. However, your adolescent child will take in more of your wisdom when you are loving them and not appearing to be lecturing, judging or criticising them. The greatest reason to live up to parents' expectations is all about the relationship with you. Adolescents want to keep the connection, respect and trust you have with them but if it is not there, there is nothing to lose which is not good for anyone. Showing belief in your child is vital!
3. We are wired to be in packs and moving towards friends to meet their needs is natural as teens grow into adulthood. They need to experiment with other groups as they move towards independence. Feeling close to friends is not about rejecting parents, it's normal and healthy and the way teens will feel strong, safe and secure. Of course this does not mean allowing your child to do everything they want with friends but without the balance of family and friends you deny your child a basic need at this time in their lives. Be the parent your child can come to when/if the friendship is not working out. Being non-judgmental, non-preaching and open will pave the way to teen-led conversations when things are not going well within a friendship, and will then give you the space to ask questions and help your child to see what is actually happening.

4. Teens need information - don't be afraid that by talking about the pointy-end topics such as drugs, sex, cyber-safety and drinking it will lead your child into risk taking behaviour. Be assured that with information, they are better prepared to understand the risks.

5. The part of the adolescent brain that decides whether something is a good idea or a bad one is changing. The brain starts to focus on the potential positives of a decision and weigh them more heavily than the negatives. This is why teens will do risky things sometimes. Disapprove of risks taken when the result is poor but know that it's when they've done something they regret, that's when they need to hear more than ever the reasons you think they are great. Your child will be disappointed enough in themselves.

The challenges will be different for everyone and the ways you manage those challenges will be vital for guiding your children through adolescence. The greatest thing we can do for our kids is help them reach their potential whilst preserving your connection, their dignity, their spirit and their strong sense of self.

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