

Middle Adolescence Development – 13 to 18 years

DESCRIPTION

An increased importance and role of the peer group generally characterize middle adolescence. The teen struggles between independence and dependence when thinking about life goals.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Physical growth and development may vary among this age group. The teen will:

- Experience most changes associated with puberty
- Have a great focus on body image
 - Teens give attention to weight, clothing, cosmetics and fashion trends
 - Teens with slower physical development may demonstrate significant concern
 - Teens with a different appearance due to injury or illness (acne) may continue to focus on body image.

EMOTIONAL AND IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The teen's emotions fluctuate between the dependence of a child and the independence of an adult. Teens may:

- Experience extreme changes in feelings
- Not consider the feelings of others
- Be unwilling to accept consequences of their behaviors - "Rules don't apply to me"
- Be able to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses
- Begin to think about life goals.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Teens focus a great deal on socialization. The teen may:

- Allow a peer group to assume a major role and have a strong influence on behavior
- Have an extreme focus on being accepted and belonging to a group
- Become more involved with teams and in clubs.

NUTRITION

A proper diet plays a very important role because of rapid growth during these years. The following tips may help:

- Fat intake should come from healthier foods such as cheese or yogurt
- Try to limit junk food and fast food meals
- Keep the household supply of junk food such as candy, cookies and potato chips to a minimum
- Stock up on low-fat, healthy items for snacks such as fruit, raw vegetables, whole grain crackers and yogurt
- Include raw or cooked fruits and/or vegetables, for the many important vitamins and minerals they contain.

SAFETY

Everyone should wear seat belts at all times when in a vehicle. Accidents pose the greatest threat to the life and health of your teenager. More teens die of injuries than all other diseases combined. Yet, most major injuries can be prevented.

It is best to keep all firearms out of your home. If you must have a gun, keep it unloaded and in a locked place with a trigger lock separate from the ammunition. Your child faces a greater likelihood of being shot by himself, a friend or a family member than by an intruder. Talk to your child about guns in school and on your streets. Find out if your child's friends carry guns.

SPORTS SAFETY

Often teens play in one or more sports during these years. Be sure your child uses the proper protective equipment for the sport.

Encourage your teen to wear a helmet while riding a bicycle or while rollerblading. Participating in these activities at dusk or after dark is very dangerous.

SEX, DRUGS, ALCOHOL, SMOKING

Discussions about sex, drugs, alcohol and smoking with your child are extremely important. Your teen may experience pressure from friends to engage in these activities. When discussing them, try to understand your child's feelings and viewpoints. Provide him or her with access to accurate and appropriate information.

INDEPENDENCE – DEPENDENCE STRUGGLE

- Some teens may reject parental and family value systems in favor of those held by their peer group
- Conflicts usually center on curfews, chores and expected role in family.

ADVICE FOR PARENTS

- Establish fair, understandable rules about chores, watching television, outside activities, homework and bedtime
- Communicate with your teen
- Show interest in your teen's daily activities
- Show affection
- Understand the importance of serving as a parental role model
- Encourage age-appropriate independence and self-responsibility
- Know your teen's whereabouts at all times.