

Adolescent development

Adolescence is the stage between childhood and adulthood. During the pre-teen and teenage years young people's bodies, thinking and emotions go through rapid, significant change. While their parenting needs may be different, they still need your love and guidance. Staying closely connected helps them feel more secure and confident. It's a great opportunity to support and positively influence their development.

Adolescence

Adolescence begins with puberty, usually at around 11 to 14 years and as young as 8 for some children.

- Hormones trigger growth spurts, bodily changes and sexual development.
- Individuals develop at different ages. The pace of development varies too.

Young people need your acceptance, reassurance and support as they adjust to their changing body and sexual feelings. If they don't feel comfortable discussing this topic, it can help to share resources, eg see SHINE SA and Raising Children Network websites.

While bodily changes are usually complete by



around ages 15-17, new thinking and emotional skills take longer to build. During this process young people develop the capacity to:

- think in more complex ways
- make decisions, solve problems, identify risks and plan ahead
- work out their own values, beliefs and views about the world.

Developing these skills involves a gradual reshaping of the brain. You can help by:

- gently supporting your young person if they seem forgetful or confused. Often when they shrug and say 'I don't know' – they really don't know! Ask specific questions, let them choose the best time to talk about their day, encourage them to lead conversations
- not taking it personally if they start to question ideas, authority and social norms – this can be a normal part of working out who they are
- modelling respectful ways to question different views and other people.

This stage of development can also bring new, intense feelings. Sometimes young people might not know what they're feeling or why.

- Give them space and time to process feelings.
- Help them learn to manage their feelings and behaviour.
- Model managing your emotions so they know how to do it.

Staying emotionally connected helps your young person feel more secure and confident as they learn to make their own decisions and take more responsibility for their lives.



Young people are likely to seek excitement and different experiences, especially with friends. While new experiences are important for learning and building confidence, they will need your help to think about safety and the outcome of their actions.

- Ask how they plan to keep safe when out or online.
- Suggest things they may not have thought of.

What else can parents do?

- Model the behaviour you expect.
- Provide consistent structure and routine.
- Be clear about what you expect and why. Involve them in setting safety and wellbeing limits.
- Respect their privacy while asking enough to make sure they know how to keep safe.
- Welcome and get to know their friends.

For further information and strategies, see Parent Easy Guides 'Guiding and supporting young people' and 'Setting limits with young people'.

Seeking help

If you have any concerns about your young person, it's important to reach out early for help, eg trusted family, friends, GP, youth service.

Let young people know you are there for them even in difficult times. You are their best resource.



Your own health and wellbeing are important too.

- Take time to do things that relax and recharge you. Young people will see you respect and value yourself.
- Reach out for support when you need it. Sharing experiences with other parents can help too.

Note: The term 'Parents' in this Guide refers to anyone caring for and/or raising children and young people.

Want more information?

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Parenting SA

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