

# Positive Parenting Tips for Healthy Child Development



## Middle Adolescence (15 - 17 years old)

### Developmental Milestones

Middle adolescence is a time of physical, mental, cognitive, and sexual changes for your teenager. Most girls will be physically mature by now, and most will have completed puberty. Boys might still be maturing physically during this time. Your teenager might have concerns about her body size, shape, or weight. Eating disorders can also be common, especially among females. During this phase of development, your teenager is developing his unique personality and opinions. Peer relationships are still important, yet your teenager will have other interests as he develops a more clear sense of identity. Middle adolescence is also an important time to prepare for more independence and responsibility; many teenagers start working, and many will be leaving home soon after high school.



Other changes you might notice in your teenager include:

### Emotional/Social Changes

- Increased interest in the opposite sex
- Decreased conflict with parents
- Increased independence from parents
- Deeper capacity for caring and sharing and the development of more intimate relationships
- Decreased time spent with parents and more time spent with peers

### Mental/Cognitive Changes

- More defined work habits
- More concern about future educational and vocational plans
- Greater ability to sense right and wrong
- Sadness or depression, which can lead to poor grades at school, alcohol or drug use, unsafe sex, thoughts of suicide, and other problems (Note: Problems at school, alcohol and drug use, and other disorders can also lead to feelings of sadness or hopelessness.)

(Adapted with permission from Bright Futures: Green M, Palfrey JS, editors. Bright Futures Family Tip Sheets: Early Adolescence. Arlington (VA): National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health, 2001. Other sources: American Academy of Child and Family Psychiatry and the American Academy of Pediatrics)

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- Talk to your teenager about her concerns and pay attention to any changes in her behavior. Ask her if she has had suicidal thoughts, particularly if she seems sad or depressed. Asking about suicidal thoughts will not cause her to have these thoughts, but it will let her know that you care about how she feels. Seek professional help if necessary.
- Show interest in your teenager's school and extracurricular interests and activities and encourage him to become involved in activities such as sports, music, theater, and art.
- Compliment your teenager and celebrate her efforts and accomplishments.
- Show affection for your teenager. Spend time together doing things you enjoy.
- Respect your teenager's opinion. Listen to him without playing down his concerns.
- Encourage your teenager to volunteer and become involved in civic activities in her community.
- Encourage your teenager to develop solutions to problems or conflicts. Help your teenager learn to make good decisions. Create opportunities for him to use his own judgment, and be available for advice and support.
- If your teenager engages in interactive Internet media such as games, chat rooms, and instant messaging, encourage him to be disciplined and respectful about the amount of time she is involved with it.
- If your teenager works, use the opportunity to talk about expectations, responsibility, and other aspects of behaving respectfully in a public setting.
- Talk with your teenager and help him plan ahead for difficult or uncomfortable situations. Discuss what he can do if he is in a group and someone is using drugs, under pressure to have sex, or offered a ride from someone who has been drinking.
- Respect your teenager's need for privacy.
- Encourage your teenager to get enough sleep and exercise, and to eat healthy, balanced meals.
- Encourage your teenager to have meals with the family. Eating together will help your teenager make better choices about the foods she eats, promote healthy weight, and give family members time to talk with each other. In addition, a teenager who eats meals with the family is more likely to have better grades and less likely to smoke, drink, or use drugs. She is also less likely to get into fights, think about suicide, or engage in sexual activity.

## Safety First

Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death from unintentional injury among teenagers, yet few teenagers take measures to reduce their risk of injury. Unintentional injuries resulting from participation in sports and other activities are also common.

- Talk with your teenager about the importance of wearing a seatbelt while driving. Insist that she obey speed limits and traffic lights, and strongly advise her not to drink and drive. Set clear rules for when and where she can use the car, and who can ride with her.
- Encourage your teenager to wear a helmet when riding a bike, motorcycle, or all-terrain vehicle.
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among youth 15 through 24 years of age. Talk with your teenager about suicide and pay attention to warning signs.

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- Talk with your teenager about the dangers of drugs, drinking, smoking, and risky sexual activity. Ask him what he knows and thinks about these issues, and share with him your feelings. Listen to what he says and answer his questions honestly and directly.
- Discuss with your teenager the importance of choosing friends who do not act in dangerous or unhealthy ways.
- Know where your teenager is and whether an adult is present. Make plans with her for when she will call you, where you can find her, and what time you expect her home.

### Links For Parents

The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) has brochures, fact sheets, and other information on various health topics for parents with children of all ages.

[CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health has a Healthy Youth!](#) webpage that addresses six critical types of adolescent health behavior that contribute to the leading causes of death and disability among adults and youth. The website's A to Z list addresses other issues that affect children and adolescents.

The [National Center on Injury Prevention and Control](#) at CDC has a website that contains information like youth violence, suicide, teen drivers, sexual violence, and other injury-related topics.

[KidsHealth](#) by the Nemours Foundation has practical information for parents, teens, and kids.

The [American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry](#) has [fact sheets](#) for parents on various issues related to child and adolescent development.

[Talk With Your Kids](#) is a national initiative by [Children Now](#) and the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#) to encourage parents to talk with their children early and often about tough issues like [sex](#), [HIV/AIDS](#), [violence](#), and [alcohol](#) and [drug abuse](#).

The National [Institute of Mental Health](#) and the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) have information and resources on child and adolescent mental health.

[The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) has information on safety recalls, and safety tips for children riding in motor vehicles, walking, biking, playing outside, waiting at school bus stops, and more.

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