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Late Adolescence: Fourteen to Eighteen

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Adolescence can be tough for some teens. Changes in hormones, increased independence, greater autonomy and decision-making, and control over one's destiny can feel overwhelming.

During this self-exploration and identity-seeking phase, teens may experiment with different hair styles and colors, clothing fads, music and extra-curricular activities. They may appear angry, moody or irritable. This is because they are beginning to think for themselves, developing their own belief system, and establishing their own values, and challenging the ideas and beliefs of authority figures including parents, teachers, and politicians.

In the past, it was believed that the transition from adolescence to adulthood was a time of storm, stress, and turbulence for teens and parents. Today, a more positive and balanced model exists. Research shows that despite the fact a number of changes are occurring, most teens continue to get along with their parents- - seeking advice and guidance.

Even though the later years are characterized by adolescents beginning to give serious consideration to their university or college of choice, career plans and other decisions that will guide their future; roughly 1/3 of high school students drop out of school each year and 1 out of 2 never completes a year of college.

Social Development: Feelings and Interaction

Teens spend a large amount of time with their peers. They may begin to date more regularly and seek opposite-sex friendships. These new relationships, school and school-related activities, and part-time employment can take up the majority of a teens time. Even though the amount of time spent with the family decreases greatly, parents and family continue to be very important.

Physical Development

During the latter part of this stage, teens are continuing to grow but at a slower rate than when the growth spurt began. Girls peak at about 11-12 and reach adult height around 15 or 16. Boys peak about 13-15 and attain their adult height around 17-18. Even though the body's growth slows down, the brain is changing dramatically.

Health & Eating Habits Many of the poor eating habits that follow into adulthood begin during the adolescent years. Because teens are involved in extra-curricular activities or work, they frequently consume large amounts of junk food, fast food and other foods that are high in calories and low in nutrition. Over 91% eat too much saturated fat; 84% eat too much total fat; 51% eat less than one serving of fruit per day; and 29% eat less than one serving of vegetables that are not fried.

Even though reasoning and problem solving are more advanced, it is not as sophisticated as adults. This is the reason teens engage in risky and dangerous behaviors.

Experimenting with dangerous, negative or risky situations and believing that consequences will not follow is embedded in the *personal fable* or belief that an individual's situation is unique and he or she is invincible.

The overwhelming majority of accidents during the teen years are thought to be alcohol or drug related. In fact, 16-year-olds are more likely to die in a car accident than any other group, with over 5,000 teens dying from automobile accidents annually.

Many teens know the danger of drinking and driving, however they will drink and drive thinking "Nothing will happen to me."

References

Berk, L. (1999). *Infants, Children & Adolescents*. Third Edition. Allyn and Bacon
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Quick Facts

- Teens are very egocentric.
- Egocentrism is the belief that one's own perspective is shared by others.
- Egocentrism limits how well teens reason and solve problems.
- Adolescents are sometimes oppositional because they think adults don't understand how they think and feel.
- Teens become more independent, but need rules and limits (even though they're likely to challenge them).
- About 1/3 of teens drop out of high school every year.
- Over 5,000 adolescents die each year from auto-related accidents.
- Approximately 1 million teens get pregnant each year.
- Most teen deaths are preventable.

This *Child Development* Fact Sheet is part of a series prepared by the Cooperative Extension Program at Tennessee State University.

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