

Parents & Teens Talking About Sex

Your Changing Teens - Who They Are and How to Reach Them

I. Early Adolescence (11-14 Years)

1. #1 concern - "Am I normal?" - will compare self with peers
2. Preoccupation with self, feelings, and body
3. Conflict with dependency needs and need to detach
4. Self exploration/masturbation
5. Highly sensitive to criticism
6. Poor impulse control
7. Present oriented to the here and now. Do not perceive future implications of actions and have limited ability for abstract thought

Communication Focus

- Information, reassurance, and anticipatory guidance to support and help with decision making.
- "Many teens have noticed.... Has this happened to you?"
- Reinforce good behavior.

II. Middle Adolescence (14-17 Years)

1. Late maturers need increased reassurance
2. Developing capacity for cause-effect and abstract thinking
3. Can see future implications but not to own actions
4. Increased involvement with peers and distancing from parents

Communication Focus

- Listen non-judgmentally - be aware of your body language.
- Positive reinforcement on good decisions, efforts to look good and take good care of health.
- Ask about peer relationships.
- Take concerns and conflicts seriously.
- Immediately acknowledge if there is any misunderstanding on your part. Teen's feelings can be intense. They can be easily offended and withdraw if they judge that they are not being taken seriously.

III. Late Adolescence (17-20 Years)

1. Established abstract thought. Can perceive and act on long range operations
2. Ability to delay gratification, set limits, and see others opinions
3. Intimacy involves commitment rather than exploration and romanticism

Communication Focus

- Acknowledge maturity and do not be stuck in the past - see as emerging adult, acknowledge their transition and progress.
- Active advice - be a source of information.
- Give factual information, empathy and support.