

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Teen Development: Understanding Your Adolescent's Life Stages

As children become adolescents, various changes in their lives may cause some unpredictable behavior. If this sounds like the child in your home, you may be wondering if it's possible to live happily under the same roof. The answer is a definite "yes"—just be prepared to enjoy a few little bumps.

Recognize that normal teen development involves both internal and external conflict as teens test their boundaries and try out their new-found independence. If their behavior sometimes seems rebellious or childlike, rest assured you have a completely normal teenager.

Developmental Changes

Teenagers are a bundle of nerves and hormones struggling to grow up. They often seem to slip backward and forward from childhood to adulthood—but never give you warning.

Days when they revert to a need for parental comfort and closeness may be quickly followed by a period of cold rebellion and emotional distance, as they're afraid that their need for you is childish.

A Parent's Role

It's hard to stand by and watch your teen struggle—you don't want to see your child hurt. But you must learn to strike a balance between letting go and holding on. Being too protective of your teen doesn't help him or her become a productive adult.

Treat your teen with respect and help him or her keep self-esteem. It's one of the best ways to help your teen on a difficult journey. Show love when your teen doesn't feel any self-love. Finally, keep a positive attitude but be realistic in your expectations.

Consider the following tips on how to be a more encouraging parent:

- Be a good role model
- Keep your sense of humor
- Respect your teen's privacy
- Sign contracts for clearer goal expectations
- Reward positive behavior
- Set limits without controlling

When to Seek Help

If your child exhibits any of the signs below, consider seeking professional counselling for him or her.

- Prolonged depression
- Continual negative statements
- Excess anger
- Talks about suicide

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- Physical or emotional abuse
- A drastic change in personality, appetite or friends
- Loss of interest in school
- Drastic deterioration in attitude

Quick action should be taken if you fear drug or alcohol abuse, or suicide. If your teen resists help, you may want to set up an appointment with a family service professional.

Although becoming a teenager can be a difficult time for both adolescents and parents, there are coping strategies that can help.