

# Understanding Adolescent Development

Adolescence is a time of major change. It usually occurs between ages 10 and 19. During these years, teens grow and develop in many ways. Here is what to expect.

## Physical Development

- Teens go through fast physical changes due to hormones.
- They may grow taller quickly and their body shape may change.
- Their reproductive system also develops during this time.

## Cognitive (Thinking) Development

- Teens begin to think in more complex ways.
- They get better at solving problems and making decisions.
- They may question rules and explore their own beliefs and values.

## Emotional Development

- Emotions can feel strong and shift often.
- Teens may struggle with self-esteem or have conflicts with peers or adults.
- They start to learn how to manage and express their feelings.

## Social Development

- Friends become very important during these years.
- Teens may pull away from family as they seek more independence.
- Family relationships may feel tense at times.

## Identity Formation

- Teens explore different roles and ideas.
- They try to understand what matters to them and who they want to be.

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## Risk-Taking Behavior

- Some teens take risks, like trying substances, driving fast or having unsafe sex.
- This can happen because they are still learning to think about long-term consequences.

## Cultural and Social Influences

- Teens are shaped by their culture, community and daily environment.
- Social media can affect how they see themselves and relate to others.

## When to Seek Help

It is important to get support when a teen's behavior affects daily life, relationships or safety.

## Warning Signs

- Persistent behavior changes:** pulling away from others, extreme moods or sudden drops in school performance.
- Risk-taking:** frequent substance use, reckless driving, self-harm or unsafe sexual behavior.
- Emotional distress:** ongoing sadness, anxiety, irritability or hopelessness.
- Social withdrawal:** avoiding friends or family.
- Relationship problems:** repeated conflict with peers, family or adults.
- Academic issues:** failing grades, skipping school or frequent disciplinary actions.
- Physical symptoms:** headaches, stomachaches or major changes in sleep or eating habits.
- Self-harm or suicidal thoughts:** any mention of wanting to harm oneself or die.

## Getting Support

Early help can keep problems from getting worse. It also gives teens a chance to learn healthy ways to cope. Parents, teachers, school counselors and health care providers can all help connect teens to the right care and resources.

*Reviewed by Care Manager, Clinical Operations, LCSW*

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