

# Twelve to Fifteen Years

## Developmental Tasks

Creating a personal identity based upon the integration of values

Developing a sense of self in relation to society, other individuals, the opposite sex, the future, personal vocation, ideas, and the cosmos



## What's Happening in the Brain?

The child's brain undergoes significant changes as it “rewires” throughout adolescence, which impacts behavior, emotions, and thinking. Research has demonstrated that the capacity for learning is never greater than during these early teen years. But like newborns, the adolescent brain is still a “work-in-progress.”

Specifically, there is now:

- ❖ Heightened response to incentives, while at the same time there is a slowing of impulse control—which is why so many teens take unnecessary risks and make poor decisions
- ❖ Loss of gray matter as connections are refined and hardwired into the developing adult brain (which is why the more teens participate in activities—positive or negative—the more likely they will continue into adulthood, e.g., playing sports, dancing, acting, or drinking and drugging)
- ❖ Change in the way the brain “reads” nonverbal communication and faces (which is why your teen might accuse you of being angry at him or her when you are not)
- ❖ A flood of reproductive and stress hormones that impact all domains of development, especially physical growth and emotions
- ❖ Change in the way the brain regulates sleep, which affects attention, fatigue, and irritability



## Domains

	Typical Characteristics	Suggested Behaviors for Effective Parenting
Physical	Experiences sudden and rapid increases in height, weight, and strength with the onset of adolescence	Provide more food and ensure adequate nutrition.
	Maturation rates differ (with girls gradually reaching physical and sexual maturity and boys just beginning to mature physically and sexually)	Explain changes in physical development; discourage comparison with peers, but be aware of problems associated with late maturation.
	May be concerned about appearance of acne (especially with certain types of skin)	If necessary, provide a special diet and/or medication to treat acne; provide assurance that blemishes will clear up eventually.
	Is concerned with appearance	Comment favorably on youth's concern with appearance.
	Experiences increased likelihood of acting on sexual desires	Provide accurate information on consequences of sexual activity; discuss birth control and safe sex practices.
Emotional	Commonly sulks; may direct verbal anger at authority figure	Understand that such behavior is typical of this stage.
	Is concerned about fair treatment of others, is usually reasonably thoughtful, and is generally unlikely to lie	Demonstrate respect for the youth as an emerging adult.
Social	Withdraws from parents (who are invariably called "old")	Don't feel hurt or take labels personally: remember you are still important, but not in the same way that you were.
	May often resist any show of affection (especially boys)	Respect boundaries, but continue to be affectionate.
	Usually feels parents are too restrictive; rebels	Set clear, firm, but flexible limits.

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	Typical Characteristics	Suggested Behaviors for Effective Parenting
Social	Needs less family companionship and interaction than previously	Allow youth more opportunities for independent social activities.
	Has less intense friendships with those of the same sex; usually has a gang of friends (with girls showing more interest in boys than boys in girls at this age)	Don't criticize the youth's need for friends or particular friends.
	May be annoyed by younger siblings	Accept the youth's feelings and help younger siblings cope with rejection.
Mental	Seeks new experiences that may involve unhealthy or even dangerous risks, e.g., using drugs or alcohol or joyriding in a car	Understand that the teen brain is naturally impulsive and struggles with good decision making. Talk openly with the youth about risks involved in certain choices; stay involved and involve her or him in determining limits.
	Thrives on arguments and discussions	Encourage debate, but don't let discussions become arguments; be careful not to put down the youth's ideas.
	Is increasingly able to memorize, to think logically about concepts, to reflect, to probe into personal thinking processes, and to plan realistically	Encourage exploration of thought and deed; provide books, library card, etc.
	Needs to feel important in world and to believe in something	Encourage youth to join causes, attend religious and community groups, etc.
	May read a great deal	Talk to youth about reading; offer suggested readings.
Moral	Knows right and wrong; tries to weigh alternatives and arrive at decisions alone	Facilitate the youth's decision making.
	Is concerned about fair treatment of others; is usually reasonably thoughtful; is unlikely to lie	Demonstrate esteem and respect for the youth as an emerging adult.

## **Indicators Related to Developmental Lag or Potential Trauma**

Delays in physical and sexual development

Depression, sense of isolation, loneliness

Extreme self-consciousness or fear of being abnormal

Suicide attempts; psychosis

Impulsiveness, extreme rebellion; pathological lying; truancy, running away

Denial of feelings, fantasy as an escape from problems

Fantasizing or discussing revenge or retribution for real or perceived harm

Poor hygiene

Alcohol/drug abuse

Eating disorders: anorexia nervosa, bulimia, obesity

Sexual activity to provide missing nurturance; pregnancy

Juvenile delinquency, stealing, prostitution