

# About Teenage Growth and Development: 11-14 Years

*Adolescence is a time of rapid physical, intellectual, social, and emotional growth. Knowing what kinds of changes to expect can help to decrease the “growing pains” for both parents and youth.*

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## Quick Facts

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The physical changes that take place during puberty are caused by hormones.

A girl will usually get her first period around the same age that her mother did.

Because teens want to fit in, most choose friends whose interests, activities, and values are similar to their own.

Talking on the phone is one way teens develop their social skills.

### Physical changes (Puberty)

For girls, puberty begins around 10 or 11 years of age and ends around age 16. Boys enter puberty later than girls—usually around 12 years of age—and it lasts until around age 16 or 17. Girls and boys usually begin puberty around the same time their mothers and fathers did. Talk with your child about the following physical changes that will happen during puberty. The changes are listed in the order in which they generally occur.

#### Girls

- body fat increases
- breasts begin to enlarge
- pubic hair grows
- height and weight increase
- first menstrual period occurs
- hips widen
- underarm hair grows
- skin and hair become more oily
- pimples may appear

#### Boys

- scrotum becomes darker
- testicles grow larger
- penis grows longer and fuller
- pubic hair grows
- breasts can get “lumps” and become tender
- height and weight increase
- muscles develop
- wet dreams occur
- voice cracks and gets deeper
- skin and hair become more oily
- pimples may appear
- underarm and facial hair grow

### Intellectual development

- Most 11- to 14-year-olds are still concrete thinkers—they perceive things as good or bad, right or wrong. This is normal. They are just beginning to imagine possibilities, recognize consequences of their actions, and anticipate what others are thinking.
- Youth begin to question family and school rules and challenge their parents.
- Preteens and teens tend to believe that bad things won't happen to them. This helps explain why they are risk-takers. For example, a young girl may believe she can smoke cigarettes without becoming addicted.
- Preteens and teens believe they are the center of attention. This explains why they are painfully self-conscious—a tiny pimple may seem like the end of the world.

### Social and emotional development

- Preteens and teens begin to spend more time with peers and less time with family.
- Preteens and teens begin to form their identity by exploring different clothes, hairstyles, friends, music, and hobbies.
- Moodiness is common as youth struggle to search for an identity.
- Preteens and teens push limits that adults put on them to assert their independence.

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- Preteens and teens have mixed feelings about “breaking away” from parents. One day your daughter may want nothing to do with you, the next she is constantly at your side.
- Troubled youth may act out (for example, get into physical fights, use alcohol or other drugs, skip school) to express emotional pain.

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## Tips for Parents

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1. Preteens and teens are sometimes embarrassed by their changing bodies and concerned that they are not developing at the same rate as their friends. Reassure your child that young people grow and develop at their own pace and that the changes are normal.
2. Do not tease your child about pubertal changes.
3. Explain the importance of good personal hygiene. Active sweat glands call for regular bathing and deodorant. For healthy teeth, everyone should brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste and floss daily.
4. Set reasonable and appropriate limits. Preteens and teens want guidance.
5. When differences arise, listen to your child and try to understand his or her point of view.
6. Choose your battles! Hold your ground on important issues such as grades and drugs, and let go of smaller issues such as hairstyles and clothes. If it won't matter a year from now, is it worth arguing over?
7. Allow your preteen or teen to make more decisions as he or she proves the ability to use good judgment.
8. If your child is acting out, talk with him or her to get to the heart of the problem.
9. Get counseling for your child or the whole family if you believe it could help.
10. Talk with other parents about your concerns, their parenting experiences, setting limits, etc.

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## Resources

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Your teen's health care provider.

Adolescent Health On Line  
<http://www.ama-assn.org/go/adolescenthealth>

Familyeducation.com:  
 Learning Network Parent Channel  
<http://www.familyeducation.com>

National Parent Information Network  
<http://www.ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/npin>

American Academy of Pediatrics. *Caring for Your Adolescent Ages 12 to 21*. New York, NY: Bantam Books; 1991.

Haffner, Debra W. *Beyond the Big Talk: Every Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Teens – From Middle School to High School and Beyond*. New York, NY: New Market Press; 2001.

Harris, Robie H. *It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex & Sexual Health*. Cambridge, Mass: Candlewick Press; 1994.

McMahon, Tom. *Teen Tips: A Practical Survival Guide for Parents With Kids 11 to 19*. New York, NY: Pocket Books; 1996.

McCoy, Kathy; Wibbelsman, Charles. *The New Teenage Body Book*. Newark, NJ: Berkley Publishing; 1992. (Available by calling 800 788-6262.)

Panzarine, Susan. *A Parent's Guide to the Teen Years: Raising Your 11- to 14-Year-Old in the Age of Chat Rooms and Navel Rings*. New York, NY: Checkmark Books; 2000.

Simpson, A. Rae. *Raising Teens: A Synthesis of Research and a Foundation for Action*. Boston, MASS: Center for Health Communications, Harvard School of Public Health; 2001.

Steinberg, L.; Levine, A. *You and Your Adolescent: A Parent's Guide for Ages 10-20*. Dunmore, PA: HarperCollins Publishers Inc; 1997.

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# About Teenage Growth and Development: 15-17 Years

*Congratulations! You and your teen have made it through what is usually the most difficult period of adolescence—11 to 14 years. Midadolescence (15-17 years) is usually an easier time for teens and parents. But don't get too comfortable. New challenges will test your patience, understanding, and parenting skills.*

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## Quick Facts

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Most teens navigate the developmental tasks of adolescence successfully.

Teens ages 15-19 have much higher mortality rates than younger children.

The leading causes of death for teens are motor vehicle crashes, homicide, and suicide.

### Physical growth

Girls have usually reached full physical development. Many teenage girls are concerned with the way they look and are dissatisfied with their bodies and their weight. Nearly half of all high school girls diet to lose weight. Boys are close to completing their physical growth. Around 15 or 16 years of age, boys' voices will lower and facial hair will appear. Boys may continue to gain height and muscle.

### Intellectual characteristics

Teens are better able to solve problems, think about their future, appreciate opinions of others, and understand the long-term effects of their decisions. However, teens tend to use these skills inconsistently; as a result, they sometimes do things without thinking first.

Teens' organizational skills improve. Many successfully juggle school, outside activities, and work.

In an attempt to answer the questions "Who am I?" and "What should I be?" teens listen to new music, try out clothing fashions, and begin to explore jobs, religion, political issues, and social causes.

Teens frequently question and challenge school and parental rules.

### Social and emotional characteristics

Older teens are more self-assured and better able to resist peer pressure than younger teens.

Teens spend less time than they used to with their families. They prefer to spend more time with friends or alone.

Teens try to make close friends and may become part of a group based on interests or attributes (sports, arts, etc.).

Teens want control over more aspects of their lives.

Teens are excited and at the same time overwhelmed by the possibilities for their future (college, work, or military).

Like adults, teens get depressed—sadness lasting more than 2 weeks, however, is not normal. Call your teen's health care provider if this happens.

Use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs is more common now than before.

Teens begin to have strong sexual urges, and many become sexually active.

Teens become more aware of their sexual orientation (homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual).

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## Tips for Parents

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1. Breaking away from parents or guardians and wanting more privacy are normal parts of growing up—don't take it personally.

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2. Although they won't admit it, teens still need parents to set limits. Rules and privileges (curfew, driving, dating, etc.) should be based on your teen's level of maturity, not age.
3. Negotiate rules with your teen. The more controlling you try to be, the more rebellious your teen is likely to become.
4. Discuss the consequences of breaking the rules and follow through with them if your teen misbehaves.
5. Teens will make mistakes and may lose your trust. It's important to give them another chance.
6. Express your values about school, work, alcohol and other drugs, and sex.
7. Encourage your teen to take aptitude and interest tests at school to identify future directions. Help your teen plan for his or her future after high school.
8. If your teen tells you that he or she is homosexual, he or she will need your love and support. You, in turn, may benefit from a support group for parents of gays and lesbians.
9. Know how to recognize the signs and symptoms of eating disorders and other mental health problems. Deal with any problem right away.
10. Talk with your teen about ways to handle pressure to drink, smoke, have sex, etc. Teach your teen how to say no and to suggest doing something different (safe). To feel comfortable talking openly with you, your teen needs to know that you will not punish him or her for being honest.

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## Resources

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Your teen's health care provider.

Adolescent Health On-Line  
<http://www.ama-assn.org/go/adolescenthealth>

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
<http://www.aacap.org>

Familyeducation.com:  
 Learning Network Parent Channel  
<http://www.familyeducation.com>

National Parent Information Network  
<http://www.ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/npin>

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American Academy of Pediatrics. *Caring for Your Adolescent Ages 12 to 21*. New York, NY: Bantam Books; 1991.

Haffner, Debra W. *Beyond the Big Talk: Every Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Teens – From Middle School to High School and Beyond*. New York, NY: New Market Press; 2001.

Harris, Robie H. *It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex & Sexual Health*. Cambridge, Mass: Candlewick Press; 1994.

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