



Living With Your Teen: Understanding Emotional Changes

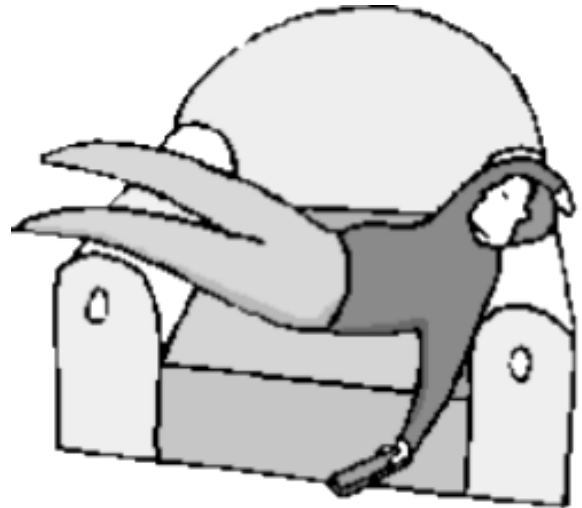
Parents of teenagers often discuss the difficulty of living with a teenager. They agree the excessive moodiness accompanying the teenage years causes much of the conflict in their families.

Emotional outbursts are common

Most adolescents are calm, predictable and purposeful most of the time. However, many parents believe their children are more moody as teens than they were at younger ages. It is important for parents to maintain a tolerant attitude during this period.

Children between the ages of 11 and 14 often become irritable, are easily excited and have difficulty controlling their emotions.

Fifteen-year-olds, on the other hand, try harder to cover up their feelings and are more apt to be moody and withdrawn. By the time teenagers reach about 16 or 17 years of age, they are calmer and less moody.



Several factors are responsible for the heightened emotions. Included are physical changes, as well as not eating healthy foods at regular times of the day. Lack of rest also may lead to moodiness and gloominess, irritability, and a tendency to overreact. Some parents have found that encouraging their teens to eat a well-balanced diet and to get adequate rest makes mood swings less of a problem.

As a child grows older, people's expectations of that child change. Children who begin to look more like adults may also be expected to behave like adults. The expectation of adult behavior can put tremendous pressure on young teens and lead to emotional outbursts.

During early adolescence, teens are concerned about learning how to behave correctly in social situations, what to talk about, and how to be popular with members of the opposite sex. While learning all this, a teen may be extremely nervous and generally excitable. Events that make teens feel they have made a mistake are likely to result in strong emotions complete with tears, slammed doors and general depression.

Parental restrictions cause many outbursts

Often, restrictions placed on adolescents by parents cause emotional outbursts. In fact, conflicts over control of the teen's life are at the root of most problems between parents and teens. On the one hand, parents may be correct when they say, "He is not responsible or careful enough to be allowed to..." On the other hand, teens may be correct when they say, "My parents continue to treat me like I am 10 years old."

Giving teens enough freedom to learn responsibility and self-reliance and yet maintaining control over potentially harmful behavior is difficult. However, parents who allow their children to make age-appropriate decisions are less likely to have problems when their children are teenagers.

For example, children who were allowed to decide what to wear at age 3, whether to join scouts at age 8, or when to do chores at age 11, are better able to make responsible decisions at age 15. They are less likely to demand more freedom.

Parents who have tried to control every aspect of their children's behavior throughout childhood are correct when they worry about their children's demands for more freedom in the teen years. The chances are that such children are unprepared to make good decisions. Many parents find it helpful to give teens as few restrictions as possible, while still making it clear there are certain aspects of behavior over which the parents will retain control.

During the teen years, some children become aware of the importance of doing well in school for future job success. In some cases, this concern results in an anxiety over school and work. Teens may begin to worry about finishing school and facing the work world.



Parents who don't push their children toward a particular vocation, but instead offer support, encouragement and help, can make these worries less troublesome for their children. While parents need to encourage their children to think about the future, they should do so in ways that make their teens feel supported and not anxious.

Ways in which you as a parent can show encouragement without pushing include: helping your adolescent explore various career possibilities; expressing interest in continued education, training programs or apprenticeships; and discussing the pros and cons of various career interests.

The emotional storminess of the teenager is difficult for both teens and their parents. Parents who are able to maintain a calm, empathic but firm approach, find that they can maintain good relationships with their teenagers most of the time.

Sources:

Judith A Hooper, University of Wisconsin – Extension.
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