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Understanding Your Teen Workbook



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INTRODUCTION

The transitions from childhood to adolescence can be just as daunting for the child as it is for the parents. How do parents cope with the changing moods, appetite and attitude? How does the puberty ridden child handle the conversion of their bodies, their thought process and their view of life?

This book aims to give an insight into what happens to teenagers during this adjustment. It will guide you through the development and give a clearer understanding of this transformation to the child, parent and family.



CONTENTS



Signs and Signals of Impeding Adolescence	P. 4
Emotions and Testing Your Child's Perception	P. 5
Sleeping Patterns	P. 6
Communication & Trust	P. 7
APPENDIX	P. 8
References	P. 9



SIGNS AND SIGNALS OF IMPEDING ADOLESCENCE

So this is the day you realised your baby is gone and is now replaced by a budding adult who in many ways have become a stranger. What do you do? It is often many parents first instinct to fight against it, however, we all know this never works. This workbook will equip you in identifying changes as well as understand what is occurring in your teenager and support them through their transition. This, I must emphasise, is going to be a challenge for both you, your child and the family. Changes will be implemented and the whole structure of your family is likely to change.



Firstly let's see what's happening to your child, what have you noticed?

1. What age is your child? Have they started puberty?
 - (a) 8 to 10 years old (Yes/No)
 - (b) 10-12 years old (Yes/No)
 - (c) 12-14 years old (Yes/No)

If your child falls between any of these ages it is likely that they have started puberty. There may not be any apparent physical signs such as growth of hair underarms, between the legs and on their face (if they are male), breasts and 'Adam's Apple'. However, changes continue to occur within the brain. This is the unseen and unnoticed but significant change that occurs (we will discuss this further on in the workbook).

Girls start younger than boys and experience rapid growth spurts as early as 8 years old. This growth spurt will last for a few years and then slow down around the ages of 17-19. Boys on the other hand are usually 2 years behind the girls, which results in continuous growth until approximately 21 years of age.

EMOTIONS & PERCEPTION

2. What changes in attitude/emotions have you noticed in your child?
 - (a) Sense of identity has increased
 - (b) Often rude to parents
 - (c) Complaints have increased regarding interference with independence
 - (d) Peers and friends have greater influence over their clothing styles and interests.

During this time the brain will start to shed grey matter through pruning. It is discarding areas that weren't used during the first few years of life and making way for the areas of the brain that are more often in use. The front part of the brain, the prefrontal cortex, is remodelled last as the pruning process begins at the back of the brain. The prefrontal cortex is the decision making part of the brain and it is responsible for your child's ability to plan and think about the consequences of actions, problem solving and even controlling impulses. Changes in this part continue into very, very late adulthood.

As the prefrontal cortex is still developing, your child may rely on the amygdala to make decisions and solve problems more than adults do. The amygdala is associated with emotions, impulses, aggressions, and instinctive behaviours. which is what is highlighted the most during puberty. I'm sure you have noticed that sometimes your child's thinking and behaviour seems quite mature but at other times very childlike with their illogical impulses and emotional ways. Very often it is the 'back-to-front' development of the brain which explains the shift and changes. Teenagers are working with a brain that is still under construction.

A group of researchers made comparisons between adolescent emotions and compared it to adults. They looked at the brains of 18 children between the ages of 10-18 and compared them to 16 adults by using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). Both groups were shown pictures of adult faces and asked to identify the emotions on the faces. What occurred was the adults correctly identified the expression of fear however the teens used words like shocked, surprised, and angry to describe the same pictures. However, what they also found through the fMRI is that the teens and adults used different parts of the brains to process what they were feeling. The adults showed activity in the prefrontal cortex, which again governs reasoning and planning, but the teens mostly used the amygdala, which is associated with impulses and instinctive behaviours. In appendix A you will find some of these pictures. You can check your teens' perception using these pictures.

SLEEP PATTERNS

3. Has your child's sleeping patterns changed?
- (a) They are tired when they get up, even if they go to bed on time (Yes/No)
 - (b) They are tired during the day and awake during the night (Yes/No)
 - (c) It is harder than usual to rouse them in the morning (Yes/No)

Sleep during adolescence is essential to the growth and wellbeing of the individual. Pubescent teens require up to 10 hours per night according to research.

Going to bed late and getting up late is part of the changes that becomes apparent with adolescents' physical growth. By putting in place a routine that ensures 10 hours rest, this will alleviate the grumpiness often associated with trying to get them up in the mornings. By agreeing and implementing a sleep schedule, you will support the growth and natural development of your teen. Irregular sleep patterns across the week can affect their biological clocks and hurt the quality of their sleep. They may develop sleep disorders such as narcolepsy, insomnia restless leg syndrome or sleep apnoea.

Lack of sleep can have detrimental consequences such as inhibited brain function, diminished alertness, and effective problem solving being reduced. Their emotions and communication levels will also be affected. Physically, their stress levels will increase and manifest as acne and other skin problems. Stress also causes eating habits to change as they may prefer to eat unhealthy foods like sweets, fried food or eating late at night due to inability to go to sleep early.

Experimenting with alcohol and increased caffeine intake also contributes to illnesses. Consider the following to aid your child in getting the recommended sleep:

- Limit screen time in the bedroom (e.g. laptop, phone)
- Ensure they get regular daily exercise
- Cut out binge eating before bed
- Agree on a sleep routine during the week



COMMUNICATION & TRUST

4. How does your teen relate to you?
- (a) They become distant and non-verbal (Yes/No)
 - (b) They respond with grunts/growls (Yes/No)
 - (c) They ignore you when you converse with them (Yes/No)

For any relationship to survive and progress, communication is vital. With your child in their adolescence stage of life it is more difficult to get them to respond or even open up. To experience an outgoing child who has suddenly turned timid, can cause extreme reactions within the family. Dr Pritchard found that there are four fundamental factors when communicating with adolescents:

- **THE NEED TO KNOW** - independence for the adolescent increases the need to know more about the world and knowing they have the support of their parents. For the parent it is to have an understanding of what is happening in their child's life and being kept in the know.
- **THE NEED TO BE KNOWN** - the child is now in a position of discovery and needing more space to explore the world. However parents are still in the place of

setting more rules and restrains to ensure their safety. It is here that you will often hear them say, "I'm grown".

- **THE NEED NOT TO KNOW** - with the knowledge of risk taking at its premium, parents' awareness of their teens exploits and risk taking is an area they often shun. Teenagers in the same vein prefer not to know about their parents worries and concerns since it will add to their already increased worries.
- **THE NEED NOT TO BE KNOWN** - disclosure of information is limited to parents from their teen. This the teen will argue "what they don't know won't make them worry". Parents on the other hand will not want the child to know that they are concerned and anxious about their new found freedom.





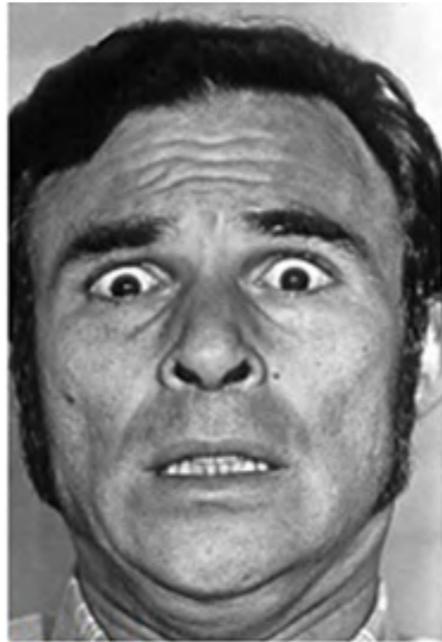
CONCLUSION

During the transition from childhood to adolescence many changes occur. For both the child and parent it is a journey. Adjusting to the changes can be daunting and very often traumatic. By journeying together and making agreed changes this will in time aid both parties in understanding and accepting the transformation. Parents, you will get to know a new person. Your child will no longer be the baby that ran to you in times of despair and is now the one that requires a listening ear and direction. Teenagers are finding

themselves and will notice changes in their personality but will be unsure why. By the time they are 21 they will not understand what all the fuss was about but will remember how parents handled their metamorphosis. ‘Knowledge is Power’ adjustment takes time, understanding the transformation will empower. Your child’s life is just beginning, help them find their destiny. The world is now their oyster.

APPENDIX - FACES AND INTERPRETATION OF EMOTIONS

HIDE THE EMOTION WORDS AND ASK YOUR TEEN TO STATE THE EMOTIONS THEY SEE.



Fearful



Angry



Sad



Happy



Disgusted



Surprised

Different facial expressions of emotion from the test created by Ekman and Friesen

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About the author

Janeth Sallaby MSc, PsyCoun, MBACP, MAFT has extensive experience teaching, counselling families and children. She is a speaker, facilitator, family strategist and founder of C.A.R.E. Counselling Service Ltd., incorporating Rose of Sharon Education. Her passion is to educate and equip families to grow together and successfully implement strategies adjusting to challenges.

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