

Getting Perspective on What Your **10- to 14-Year-Old** Is Going Through

**FORWARD
TOGETHER**

A better understanding of key stages in early teen years can help you better connect with the young people in your life

Adolescence? It can be a difficult time, even for a “super parent”, to get through to their child. The fact is that we all struggle with building relationships with young people. You’re not alone.

Fortunately, researchers have spent decades trying to help parents connect to young people and understand why it’s so hard. There actually are some answers. The guidelines below describe most young people, but every young person is unique in their development. There is never an exact time that parents can expect these changes to occur.

The great news is that even though young people are always changing and growing, there are plenty of tips available to help understand how to best relate to them and support them in their growth.

Early adolescent development, ages 10 to 14:

Adolescence is the time when bodies, brains, attitudes and personalities can change very fast. If you think you’re confused watching it, imagine how confusing it can be for the young person. They’re caught in-between. They want to grow up and do adult things, but they still hold on to some of the things they will soon consider “childish”. Here are a few ideas of what’s going on inside:

Bodies: Young people see rapid growth and change at this age and most often need privacy to understand the changes taking place in their bodies. When they’re concerned about changes in their body, parents can reassure them the changes are “normal”.

Brains: While brains continue to develop until age 25, brain growth peaks at ages 11 to 12, when they actually start to “trim” less-used parts. Young people begin developing skills for longer-term planning, complex thinking and understanding their emotions. They are only now starting to see how their decisions might affect their future. Keep this in mind when you wonder why they struggle to understand how their actions can have good or bad results down the road.

Attitudes: Striving for independence has begun. (That’s probably no surprise to you.) Testing new things and pushing limits are normal. Young people become interested in learning ‘adult’ tasks for themselves, whether cooking or driving or trying substances (like drinking or smoking). They can still have trouble seeing two sides of an issue. They are exploring their gender, ethnicity and sexuality.

“It would be cool if they (parents) could step into my shoes for the day, so they could really see what it’s like and actually understand how hard it is. ‘Oh, I know how you feel.’ They don’t know how I feel, so they can’t really know what will really make me feel better.”

– Durango middle Schooler

Relationships: With everything that is happening to them, they need safety and stability in their relationships. They are also realizing they can have relationships with different people and in different ways. This can look different than traditional connections with parents and caregivers. They may demand independence and still be sad that their family relationships are changing as they grow.

As a parent and caregiver, give yourself credit for trying to understand how the brains and bodies in your household are developing. Just reading this guide is a great step that shows you care and that you’re working to make the relationship with your child stronger!

Don’t forget that every child develops at their own pace. It’s okay if your child is maturing at a different pace than other youth. By building a deeper relationship with them now, you will be close enough to know how best to help them.

Get additional ideas and tips at: [ForwardTogetherCO.com](https://www.ForwardTogetherCO.com)