

Getting Perspective on What Your **15- to 17-Year-Old** Is Going Through

**FORWARD
TOGETHER**

A better understanding of key stages in adolescence can help you understand how to connect with the young people in your life

Adolescence? It can be difficult, 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 15 to 17:

Teens between 15 and 17 are starting to drive, thinking about jobs or college, dating and questioning authority. That’s what happens at this age – don’t be too surprised. With a little peek into what’s going on inside of a mid- to late-teenager, you can be there to support them in the ways they need.

Bodies: Reproductive organs continue to mature – this connects to both strong feelings of romantic and sexual attraction and doubts about attractiveness and sexuality. Big energy and appetite are often followed by sleepiness and disinterest in food. The need for sleep is real, till noon and beyond.

Brains: Compared to ages 10-14, at this age, young people have a more developed frontal brain, which helps them with complex reasoning, planning, self-reflection and managing emotion. As they move toward late teen years, they often begin to understand what they want for their life and may question others’ opinions and guidance.

Attitudes: Teenagers may be looking for new connections outside their families. This doesn’t mean that they don’t still appreciate and value the relationships within their family. It will take time and experience to form their own values. They may be vocal about how it differs from yours or from the world at large. They can be self-focused with either figuring themselves out or thinking about how they fall short of some “ideal.”

“That’s why I think my mom and I have such a good relationship; we always talked when I was in middle school.”

- Durango high Schooler

Relationships: Peer relationships begin to compete for space with family time or school activities. Friendships and time spent shift from childhood activities like sports, to chosen relationships based on shared interests and values. Peers can influence risk-taking, but they can also be positive influences.

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.

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