

ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence commences between 10 - 14 years of age. This is the time that you will start noticing changes to children's body shapes, body odour, breast growth in females, growth spurts and of course periods.

Children's brains are also changing at the same time as their bodies during adolescence. The central reasons for the social and personal changes occurring during adolescence are centred around the emergence of a coherent sense of self. Throughout the adolescent stage of development children's brains begin to change as they form firm ideas about the following concepts:

1. Autonomy and independence
2. Peer relationships and recreational goals
3. Educational and vocational goals (Ages 17-19 have some idea where they want to head in life)
4. Body image integrity
5. Sexual self-concept
6. Moral value system
7. Financial independence
8. Moral value system

Some of the key messages of advice for parents of adolescents to help them through these physical and mental changes were:

- Make time to talk with your children about their feelings and reassure them that if things change or worry them, you are there to listen and help them to understand.
- One of the best ways to support adolescents through challenges is to try to listen and understand without passing judgement. Most of the time they don't want parents to solve the problem, they want them to understand the way they are feeling.
- A useful place for starting tricky conversations with children is when you are driving them around as this negates the need for eye contact which often creates heightened anxiety.
- The development of resilience in adolescents is usually stronger when they feel that they have a strong relationship with, and feel comfortable talking to, both their parents and at least one other trusted adult. (E.g. Grandparent, Aunty, Teacher, Sports Coach)
- Adolescents need boundaries about acceptable behaviours. Be firm and consistent about the non-negotiables. Ensure that you help your adolescent to maintain a balanced and nutritious diet and be physically active during this stage of development, as this growth spurt is the time in life that they build bone strength that is needed later in life.
- Mood and interest changes are a normal and common occurrence during Adolescence. However, it is important that parents are aware of any periods of sustained disinterest, sadness and boredom that vary from their child's normal behaviour as these can be indicators that your child might require some mental health support.

Key resources that were recommended for parents to refer to are:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/english/ages-stages/pages/default.aspx>

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens>

<https://www.parenttoolkit.com/>

<https://childdevelopmentinfo.com/>

Book- Girl Stuff 8-12 by Kaz Cooke