

# FACTS *for* FAMILIES

No. 57 (06/01)

## **NORMAL ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT**

### **Middle School and Early High School Years**

Parents are often worried or confused by changes in their teenagers. The following information should help parents understand this phase of development. Each teenager is an individual with a unique personality and special interests, likes and dislikes. However, there are also numerous developmental issues that everyone faces during the adolescent years. The normal feelings and behaviors of the middle school and early high school adolescent are described below.

### **Movement Towards Independence**

- Struggle with sense of identity
- Feeling awkward or strange about one's self and one's body
- Focus on self, alternating between high expectations and poor self-esteem
- Interests and clothing style influenced by peer group
- Moodiness
- Improved ability to use speech to express one's self
- Realization that parents are not perfect; identification of their faults
- Less overt affection shown to parents, with occasional rudeness
- Complaints that parents interfere with independence
- Tendency to return to childish behavior, particularly when stressed

### **Future Interests and Cognitive Changes**

- Mostly interested in present, with limited thoughts of the future
- Intellectual interests expand and gain in importance
- Greater ability to do work (physical, mental, emotional)

### **Sexuality**

- Display shyness, blushing, and modesty
- Girls develop physically sooner than boys

## Normal Adolescent Development, "Facts for Families," No. 57 (06/01)

- Increased interest in sex
- Movement toward heterosexuality with fears of homosexuality
- Concerns regarding physical and sexual attractiveness to others
- Frequently changing relationships
- Worries about being normal

### **Morals, Values, and Self-Direction**

- Rule and limit testing
- Capacity for abstract thought
- Development of ideals and selection of role models
- More consistent evidence of conscience
- Experimentation with sex and drugs (cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana)

Young teenagers do vary slightly from the above descriptions, but the feelings and behaviors are, in general, considered normal for each stage of adolescence.

For additional information see Facts for Families: #24 Know When to Seek Help For Your Child, #62 Talking to Your Kids About Sex, #63 Gay and Lesbian Adolescents; **See also: *Your Child* (1998 Harper Collins)/*Your Adolescent* (1999 Harper Collins).**

###

The Development of the Facts for Families series is a public service of the AACAP. If you would like to support expanded distribution of the series, please make a tax deductible contribution to the AACAP Campaign for America's Kids. By supporting this endeavor, you will support a comprehensive and sustained advocacy effort on behalf of children and adolescents with mental illnesses.

Please make checks payable to AACAP, and send to: AACAP, Campaign for America's Kids, P.O. Box 96106, Washington, D.C. 20090

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) represents over 6,000 child and adolescent psychiatrists who are physicians with at least five years of additional training beyond medical school in general (adult) and child and adolescent psychiatry.

Facts for Families is developed and distributed by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP). Facts sheets may be reproduced for personal or educational use without written permission, but cannot be included in material presented for sale. To purchase full sets of FFF, contact the AACAP Publications Clerk at: 1.800.333.7636, ext. 131.

Nelson A. Tejada, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, Operations Department, Phone: 202-966-7300 ext. 131, Main Fax: 202-966-2891, Publication Fax: 202-464-9980