



YOUR TEENAGER...

A WORK IN PROGRESS.

Adolescence is about creating an identity, an image. It is a time for recognising one's strengths, weaknesses and roles within the family and extended peer group. These teenage years are characterised by the disengagement from parents and an intense emotional life. There can be an associated period of grief and loss at the reality of losing one's childhood which, combined with puberty and its considerable biological changes, has the potential to produce significant changes in behaviour. Add to that academic expectations, peer group pressure and the natural pursuit of fun and risk taking and the scene is set for some individuals in this age group to become vulnerable to unhelpful coping strategies. In their search for an identity that fits, young people will find creative ways to satisfy their feelings of inferiority and their need to belong. Sometimes however the creative means are not healthy and can lead to social, emotional, and physical problems.

Teenagers need at least one caring adult to help them negotiate the challenges in their lives and to understand their behaviour without judgment. The adult's goal is to raise self-esteem and provide guidance for good decision making. Expectations of conduct should be communicated clearly, whilst allowing for mistakes and set-backs. They need to know that failure is a normal part of life and has nothing to do with their self-worth or identity. Expect challenging behaviour from your adolescent, it's a normal part of their development. Listen carefully and try not to interrupt, even if what they are telling you feels uncomfortable. Ask non-direct, general questions creating an environment devoid of judgment or blame so that the young person feels safe to make mistakes.

Choice and negotiation are very important to this age group, along with mutual respect and a sense of control over their own decisions. Use an approach of curiosity "help me understand...",

“explain that to me...” and treat the young person as the expert in their own life. Be aware of your own attitudes, upbringing and beliefs and maintain appropriate boundaries ensuring that there is consistency, flexibility and fairness in your approach. Like all great works of art, time and care are required. Parents can cope with their teenager’s push for independence and identity if they recognise that adolescence is a ten to fifteen-year transitional period in the journey towards adulthood. It is not an overnight accomplishment.

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