

Chapter 2

Growing Up In Adolescence

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Growing Up in Adolescence

I Did It My Way

One would be hard pressed to find a period of growth and development as challenging as the developmental period of adolescence. Life as a two-year-old toddler probably comes the closest, but adolescence is by far and away the number one most disruptive, confusing, frustrating, yet engaging period of life.

Adolescence is a period of time when everything known to be true is challenged, discarded, or modified. All old ideas, beliefs, morals, and values are looked upon with suspicion. Experimentation is the way of life for an adolescent, along with numerous feelings of success and failure. Rules and expectations are both valued and shunned at the same time. Rules are limits and put a curb on experimentation. However, life without rules or expectations would be too scary and overwhelming for any adolescent.

Living With a Parent

Many teens feel that living seven years with a parent is a fate worse than death. It can be, but does not have to be. During this time of confusion, experimentation, and high anxiety for everyone, what teenagers need most from parents is support, understanding, friendship, and communication. Unfortunately, far too many teenagers are given threats, more rules, more restrictions, and distrust.

All of us have needs. To better understand the world of teenagers, you need to understand what is important to you and what is not. Socially, friends are very important. At times, it seems like your friends are more important than your family and that is probably true. Boyfriends, girlfriends, dating, going steady, and being accepted by your peer group are very, very important. It is a way of testing out who you are and what you know. It is your peer group that provides you with your identity; capable, incapable, smart, dumb, good looking, ugly, leader, follower, star player, or spectator. Making it with your peer group is probably the most important task of adolescence. Don't be surprised when you would rather stay with your friends than go with your family somewhere. It's a natural response.

Autonomy and Independence

Two words best summarize the period of adolescence: independence and autonomy. Adolescents like to feel in control, want to make their own decisions, want to choose their own friends, and don't want to be told how to look, how to dress, or how to think. But some parents are not willing to let go. You are probably thinking to yourself,

"Yup, those are my parents he's talking about." Actually, most parents are this way to some degree or another with their teenagers. Just think of all the times someone with good advice and who "knows more" because they are older (like your parents or teachers) tells you what to do. Your first response is probably "No" even before you hear what the person is telling you. It's your way of expressing your independence.

However, parents get tired of all your challenges, your refusals, your apparent uncooperativeness, etc. Go easy on them. They are still your parents and for the most part, they are trying to understand you. You can achieve autonomy and independence while still being cooperative. A good balance of both is desirable.

Intellectual Growth

Intellectually, your ability to think abstractly has grown by leaps and bounds. Instead of dealing with things "the way they are," you begin to think about things "the way they could be." Statements like, "This is my house and as long as you live under my roof you obey my rules" made by parents simply are not accepted by teenagers because they want to know the logic or reason behind some action or rule, not just do something because someone says so. Parents who do not realize the purpose behind all the "whys" teenagers ask can find life with their teenagers one battle after another. Talking with, listening to, compromising, negotiating and problem solving are the only ways parents and teenagers can live in harmony.

Generally, most people don't like to be told what to do. This is never truer than during adolescence. You have as big a struggle living with your parents as your parents have living with you. Each family makes the choice of working together or working apart.



Families should be a lot like oak trees: strong yet not controlling; inviting yet not overwhelming; flexible enough to accommodate individuality; and, the source of

unquestionable support, love and acceptance. As a teenager, you have responsibilities to your self, your family, and your friends. All are important. Work toward maintaining the proper balance.

Adolescent Needs

Whether we are babies, teenagers, or adults, we all have the same areas of needs. To remember these categories of needs, it helps to think of the word SPICES:

Social Needs

The need for friendship and companionship – usually sought from our peer group.

Physical Needs

The need for sleep, food, exercise, air, water, and sex.

Intellectual Needs

The need for intellectual stimulation like thinking new thoughts, reading challenging books, and learning something new.

Creative Needs

The need to express our self: to make something, dance, write a poem, paint, etc.

Emotional Needs

The need for love, praise, feeling worthwhile, security, trust, and self-regard.

Spiritual Needs

The need to know that we are part of something bigger than ourselves and that we can increase our awareness and sensitivity to the greater aspects of life.

Our Self-Esteem and Self-Concept

Everyone has self-esteem. **Self-esteem is how we feel about ourselves.** Recognizing how we feel about ourselves is important because feelings are a primary motivator of our behavior. We behave the way we feel. When we feel good about ourselves (high self-esteem) we are more capable of treating others the same way – good. When we feel bad about ourselves (low self-esteem) we are also more capable of treating others the same way – bad.

Working on keeping our self-esteem high will help us be kind and nurturing to others.

Everyone also has a self-concept. **Self-concept is what we think about ourselves.** Being aware of what we think of ourselves is also important. Along with our feelings, our thoughts also guide our behavior. We use our knowledge of ourselves to make choices, make decisions, problem

solve, and identify right from wrong. If we don't think highly of ourselves (low self-concept) the choices and decisions we make will reflect our low self-concept. When we feel like a loser, we act like a loser and treat others accordingly – like losers.

When we think highly of ourselves (high self-concept) the choices and decisions we make will tell everyone we think we are winners. A winner is someone who thinks good things about him/herself and acts that way. When you think of yourself as a winner, people will treat you that way. Then you, in turn, treat others as winners.



A positive self-concept (thoughts of self) and a healthy self-esteem (feelings of self) together are primarily responsible for the way we behave.

Praising Teenagers and Their Behavior

What is Praise?

Praise can be a compliment, gesture, facial expression, or form of gentle touch like hugs or high-fives that promote feelings of self-pride, worth and accomplishment in others. In praising teens, parents are pointing out the value of their personal traits and characteristics, as well as their abilities, efforts and achievements.

Why are Praising Teens and Their Behavior so Important?

1. When teens receive praise, they learn that who they are and the things they do are pleasing to parents.

2. Teens who are praised for their behavior, or for their personal qualities develop a personal sense of self-worth.
3. Praise is like fuel that powers the positive self-worth of teens. Teens who sincerely believe they have worth treat themselves and others in positive ways.
4. Years of research have indicated that teens with positive self-worth get better grades, are more popular in school, don't get discouraged easily, and generally live more productive lives.

Two Types of Praise: Praise for Being and Praise for Doing

There are two types of ways to use praise as a parenting practice. One way is called "Praise for Being" and the other way is called "Praise for Doing."

Praise for Being is the highest form of praise a teen, or anyone else for that matter, can receive. It tells teens that just because they are your son or daughter, they have value and worth. Praise for Being lets teens know you value them for just who they are. It is unconditional and given freely at any time.

Some **Praise for Being** statements are:

- "I really love you!"*
- "You're a kind person."*
- "What a special person you are."*
- "I'm so happy you are my son."*
- "You're a wonderful daughter."*

Praise for Being praises a teen for whom he or she is.

People like to know they are appreciated for their efforts and accomplishments. Teenagers are no different. When they hear Praise for Doing something they know they've pleased mom and dad. Praising a teenager's behavior can be for something they tried and completed, or tried but didn't quite succeed or finish. As parents, if you acknowledge your teen's efforts, they are more likely to try again.

Some **Praise for Doing** statements are:

- "Good job cleaning your room!"*
- "I'm really pleased to see you try so hard."*
- "Thanks for cooperating."*
- "Thanks for walking the dog."*
- "I appreciate your help."*

Praise for Doing lets teens know you appreciate and value their efforts and behavior.

Using Praise Correctly

Many parents unknowingly use praise incorrectly by using Praise for Being and Praise for Doing together. An example of such statements are:

"What a nice job cleaning your room! I really love you when you cooperate with me."

Such statements indicate to teens that you only love or appreciate them when they do something that pleases you. That's known as "conditional love" – love that has to be earned. Teenagers quickly learn to resent such love because they know if they don't do something, their parents won't love them.

Promote Self-Praise

Self-praise is a way others in your family can learn the habit of praising themselves and boosting their self-image. To help a teenager learn self-praise, parents need to describe how good the act must have made the teenager feel. Imagine yourself in the shoes of your teen and describe the feeling:

"I bet getting all C's and B's on your report card really feels like an accomplishment."

"You have a lot to be proud of the way you..."

Promoting self-praise encourages others to feel good about who they are and what they do. It's important for maintaining a positive self-regard.



Modeling Self-Praise

The best way to help others in your family learn to praise themselves is by modeling self-praise. Praising yourself in the presence of others tells them you think highly of

yourself. You need not overdo it; just simply praise yourself for being or doing.

*"I am proud that I controlled my temper in the traffic jam."
"Boy, I look good today!"*

Go ahead. Toot your own horn! You deserve it.

How to Praise

1. **Focus your attention on the person and the situation.** Praise deserves your undivided attention.
2. **Move close to the person.** It feels good to be praised by someone close to you.
3. **Make eye contact.** If you're praising a child, get down on the child's level. For instance, stoop down to make contact with a young child – this makes it all the more special.
4. **Look pleasant.** Everyone likes to see a happy face.
5. **Touch the person in a gentle way.** Perhaps hold the person's hand. It's nice to be touched while being praised.
6. **Describe what you see.** *"You did a great job doing the dishes."* Share your pleasure, "I appreciate your efforts," or *"I love you."*
7. **Praise ANYTIME!** There is no such thing as too much praise.

Praise for Being and Praise for Doing are the two most effective ways of building positive self-esteem and self-concept.

Being "Conceited"

Some parents worry about their children growing up being conceited because they receive praise for the people they are or the things they do. Conceit is different from self-worth. When teens feel conceited, they are usually sending the message that "I'm better than you." Contrary to belief, it's teenagers (or adults) who don't have a positive self-image that act conceited. In this sense, conceit is their effort to elevate their self-worth at the expense of others.

Session 2

Home Practice Assignment

1. During Family Home Nurturing Time:
 - a. Practice the techniques of Praise for Being and Praise for Doing. Have each family member say one Praise for Being and one Praise for Doing to each other. Use the day's events as a basis for the praise statements. Make a commitment as a family to recognize the good in others.
 - b. Discuss the family's involvement in the program so far. Ask the question, "How is it going?"
2. End the discussion with a family hug. Let everyone make physical contact in a way that is safe.
3. During the week:
 - a. Practice praising other family's members for being and doing.
 - b. Practice praising yourself twice each day: once for being and once for doing.
 - c. Read the information located in **Chapter 2** in your **Handbook**. (Parents read Chapter 2 in the Parent Handbook; Teens read Chapter 2 in the Adolescent Handbook).

NOTES: