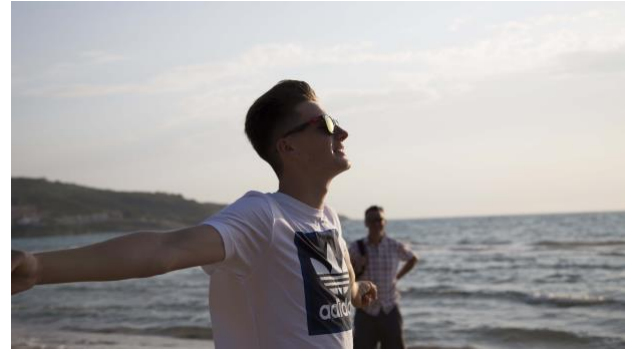


Parenting Teenagers

At Sharing Parenting we get lots of questions about what *behaviours* parents and carers can expect to see once their child moves in to the teenage years.



What is normal?

We don't like to use the term 'normal', as what is normal for one family, might be very different for another. However, we have listed a few behaviours and changes that you can expect to see in your teenager below.

Brain Changes

The first thing to mention is that there are major brain changes happening for teenagers during this time. For them, they may feel concerned, upset or embarrassed about some of their behaviours. It is important to remember that some of their behaviour changes are out of their control. **They will need your support and understanding during this time.**

When can teenage behaviours start?

Changes can start from the age of 11 or 12 years old (start of puberty) and don't stop until the brain is fully matured (which can be up to the age of 25 years old).

1. Sleep



Your teenager is experiencing big hormonal changes. One of these is called Melatonin. Melatonin is the hormone we all need to sleep. For teenagers this hormone often won't reach them until 11.00pm, which makes it difficult for them to feel sleepy or go to sleep.

How you can support them

- Understand that they may not feel sleepy until much later in the evening.

- **Encourage** a calm environment in the evening but do not insist on sleep. Low lights, reading, listening to music, coming off screens may help to keep them and the house calm.
- Let them **nap** after school to catch up on sleep and/or **lie in** at the weekends.

2. Friends



Friends become really important to teenagers. Parents may feel they have to take a back seat during this time or that their relationship is not the same.

How you can support them

- **Understand** that this is a natural part of growing up and maturing. The strong foundations that you have set in all the previous years will still be there. Once they have passed through the teenage years you may feel they have 'come back'.
- Show an **interest** in your teenager's friends. Allow your teenager to invite their friends around or out with you and your teenager for the day.
- Ask them what they like about their friend. What makes a good friend?
- Continue to create opportunities for you to communicate with your teenager - plan car journeys, walks, tasks such as cooking together etc. - where natural conversations will happen.

3. Spending time in their room or talking less



Often teenagers like to spend more time on their own or in their room. Remember they are often tired because they struggle to get enough sleep at night.

How you can support them

- **Allow** them to have time alone without taking it personally.

- **Encourage** time when you can be together so you can check in with them and keep the communication open - this may be dinner time or on a walk or car journey.
- Be **prepared** to speak to them when they are feeling communicative - this is often later in the evening - be prepared to swap things around so you can be available to them even if you are feeling tired.

4. Risk



To feel the same excitement as they did before their teenager years, teenagers need to experience a higher degree of risk, and will often seek it out!

How you can support them

- **Understand** they might enjoy risky behaviours - at the same time as keeping them **safe**.
- Plan and encourage **controlled risky activities** such as skate boarding, organised off road cycling, organised high rope activities, paint balling etc.
- **Talk to them** about your house rules/boundaries and what is acceptable and what is not.
- **Seek advice** if you are concerned about illegal or dangerous behaviours.

5. Food and drink



Your teenager will need to drink and eat more during the teenage years. This is due to the hormonal and physical growth during this time.

How you can support them

- **Understand** this is a biological and physical need and don't make them feel bad about eating or drinking more.

- Encourage **healthy food choices** but allow occasional lapses.
- **Get them involved** at dinner time - invite them to help you prepare dinner or encourage them to shop, cook or choose a meal once a week for the family.
- Encourage them to help you **shop and budget**.
- Provide them with a **large water bottle** to carry around with them.
- **Stock up** on pasta and foods that will fill them up!

6. Sarcasm



Teenagers don't usually like sarcasm - even though they may use it on you or others. This can often be misinterpreted and can damage their self-esteem.

How you can support them

- **Avoid sarcasm** and protect your relationship and trust with them.
- Use **'I' statements** if they are using words that hurt you - For example say: "I feel upset about that".

7. Movement - this may affect their balance.



Whilst these physical and mental changes take place, teenagers may feel out of touch with their own body. This may affect the way they move, walk and balance.

How you can support them

- **Understand** that this can be a confusing time for teenagers.
- Be positive about any changes. If you are concerned about their weight, encourage **healthy bodies** or lifestyles, rather than talking about how much they weigh or their clothes size.
- Encourage **physical activities** that interest them - cycling, walking, yoga, skateboarding, swimming etc.

8. A sexual interest



Teenagers may begin to experience sexual feelings or an interest in others.

How you can support them

- **Keep communication open** and talk about healthy relationships and behaviours.
- **Try to listen** and be open minded.
- Remember to keep them safe - age and stage.

9. Eye contact



Often teenagers don't like too much eye contact and may see it as interrogation!

How you can support them

- Don't insist on eye contact.
- Try not to sit opposite your teenager when communicating. You may find if you **go for a walk or drive or do a task together** - such as baking, shopping, construction - the conversation will flow better.

10. Memory and organisation



Whilst the brain is re-pruning and making new connections, teenagers often forget things or find it hard to organise themselves. Often parents talk about how they 'used to be' and worry they have lost the skills they once had.

How to support them

- **Understand** that they are likely to forget and lose things, and they are not doing it on purpose or because they don't care.
- Encourage **routines and provide places** for them to keep their things. For example a cupboard for school books, a desk where they can do their homework etc.
- Use **natural consequences** to encourage responsibility. For example, if they lose their new trainers they will have to wait or save for a new pair.
- **Avoid labelling them** - label the behaviour not the person. For example 'That was a forgetful thing to do' rather than 'You are forgetful'.

12. Emotional regulation - outbursts!



Whilst the brain is working hard it may also misfire. You may see strong emotions such as anger or tears. Emotions felt during the teenage years can feel much stronger, deeper and more important than at other times.

How you can support them

- Try to be **empathetic**.
- Use **I statements** to explain to them how their behaviour makes you feel.
- Talk to them about the brain changes and feelings they make experience and discuss ways they can support themselves during this time - journaling, meditation, talking to someone they can trust etc. may help.
- **Talk to them** when they are calm, about what they could do next time they feel that way - for example: go to their room or the garden, say 'I need to think about' this etc.

Further Support

If you are concerned about any behaviours which you feel are unusual or dangerous please contact your GP, school or other organisation for further information.