

**Your Changing
Adolescent:
What is typical and
when to ask for
help?**

Introductions

What grade is your child in?

What changes have you seen in your child?

....

Middle School is Unique

3 Domains

Physical changes

Cognitive “rewiring”

Social Awareness and Needs

Cognitive Rewiring

MRIs on 1000 “kids” over a nine year span found that the throughout the teens years and into the 20s, “substantial growth occurs in a brain structure called the corpus callosum. The corpus callosum is a set of nerves that connects all the parts of the brain that must work together to function efficiently, as in making good decisions. This set of “wires” is critical to things like intelligence, consciousness, and self – awareness.”

-Jay Giedd, NIMH (1991)

Also...

“prefrontal cortex of the brain goes through a wild growth spurt that coincides with the onset of the adolescence. In fact they found that this part of the brain does the bulk of it’s maturation between the ages of 12 and 20.”

So...

This can create new and unpredictable neurological pathways.

Can stunt the ability in recognizing and processing emotions.

-(Dr. Yurgelun-Todd)

Some common “disorders”

– Michael Bradely, Ed. D

Shepherdus Germanus Seizure Syndrome

“WHY DID YOU DO THAT?”

Aphasia Whenus Iwannus

If they can't explain it to themselves, how can they explain it to you

Maturantionnus Erraticus

Are they 6 years old or 16 years old?

Moodus Elevatoris Irrationnus

“Can we go to the beach? WHY DO YOU MAKE ME GO TO THE BEACH?”

Have you ever
had this
conversation?

How was your day?

Fine.

Who did you hang out with?

My friends.

Which friends?

*Why do you keep asking me all
of these questions?!*

**How about
this one?**

Did you do your homework?]

(unintelligible grunt)

Can you show me?

*Why don't you trust me?! You always make
such a big deal about everything! Nobody
else's parent bothers them like this. What's
wrong with you?!*

“My child used to be affectionate and tell me everything...all of the details about her day. Now she won't tell me anything. All I get are one word answers and grunts...and she gets mad when I ask her simple questions. What's going on? Should I be worried?”

What is happening?

She's 'breaking away' so that she'll eventually be able to stand on her own as a young adult.

Peers bridge the gap between dependence on parents to becoming a full-functioning independent adult. That's why she talks nonstop to peers but not to you.

Focusing on peer relationships helps kids learn to be less dependent on parents—a necessary step to becoming happy, independent adults. It's still your job to insist on respect and to keep your child safe.

What to do, what to do?

- Don't lecture her or tell her how hurt you feel.
- Try to have positive interactions with her.
- Engage her in activities you've enjoyed doing together.
- Sit down to meals with her.
- Don't pump her for information. Instead, open up and share something funny or interesting about your own life. If you open up, she's more likely to do the same.
- Talk to her with respect and make it clear that you value her opinions and expect respect in return.

What to do, what to do?

- Set appropriate limits, but focus on strengthening your relationship, too. You'll get more respect if your child feels connected to you.
- Resist the urge to lecture. If you can do that, your child won't need to push you away in order to become himself.
- Remember that teenagers can be emotional. Look for the distress under the disrespect, and remind your child of who he really is. By saying something like, "I know you're upset but aren't normally unkind," you can create the beginning of a conversation.

My child speaks to no one and spends all her time in her room with the door closed. She has withdrawn from friends, lost interest in activities that once gave her pleasure, and has grown increasingly isolated. Should I be worried?

**This *may* be
cause for
concern**

This may be cause for concern and falls outside the realm of the normal teenage development.

You need to find out whether your child has undergone some kind of trauma or is abusing drugs or alcohol.

In rare cases, this behavior could also indicate the beginning of a serious mental health issue such as depression, schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. (These usually develop in the later teen years, though)

What might be happening?

It's dangerous if your child is pulling away from everyone she knows.

One more thing...

Retreating into an online world isn't an acceptable substitute for talking to people in real life. Internet relationships can become very intense very fast, and it's hard to know if the people your daughter is friends with online are a good influence, or even who they say they are.

What to do?

- If your child seems hostile and angry, give her the chance to explain if you've done something wrong.
- Privacy only goes so far. No teenager's room should be off-limits to a parent. You have the right to know what your child is doing in her room, especially if she is spending hours at a time alone there.
- In cases where your child refuses to communicate, it may be advisable to monitor her social media.

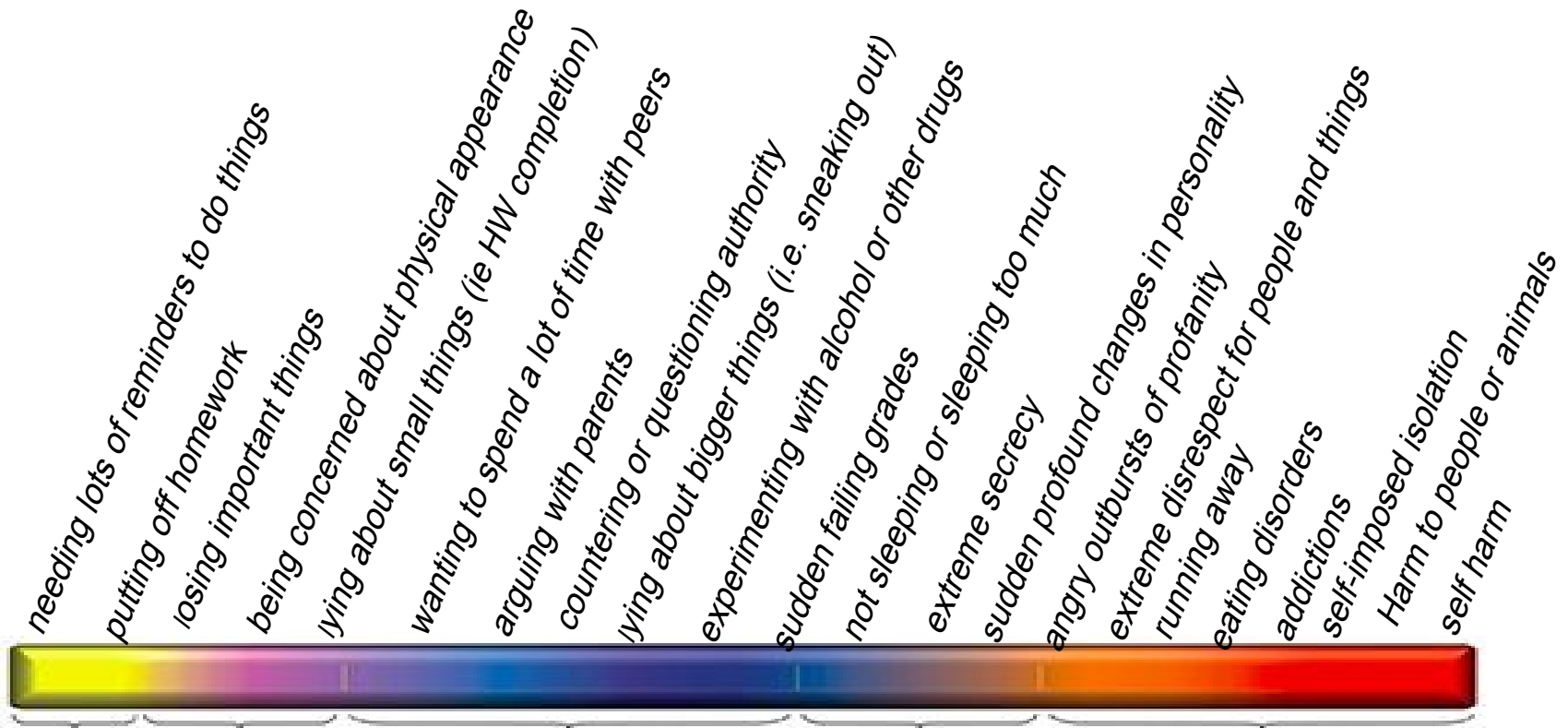
My child mentions that they are concerned about their friends behavior. They say their friend doesn't seem to be interested in hanging out and seems to spend more time on social media talking to people they don't know. Should I be worried?

What to do?

- If your child has brought this to your attention, chances are that they think it's important.
- Ask them what they think you should do. Ask them why this might be.
- Depending on your relationship with the child and parent you could talk to them.
- Suggesting that your child "stay away" from the other child may backfire.

What's happening with our adolescent?

Spectrum of 10-14 year old behavior



Typical teen behavior...pushing boundaries....intervention needed...consider professional help....professional help a necessity

How to intervene?

Have a calm discussion with
your child (difficult)

Refrain from making
judgements (really difficult)

Be sure to leave the door open
for future discussions

Alert List

1. Declining school performance
2. An abrupt change in behavior (hyperactivity to social isolation).
3. A marked change in sleeping or eating habits, such as excessive sleepiness, or loss of appetite.
4. Familial disruptions (illness, death, divorce)
5. Evidence that the teenager is being disparaged in the home. Friends and teachers should take note when it becomes apparent that a teenager is not communicating with the family, that he or she is feeling alienated.
6. An absence of normal social contacts.
7. Impulsiveness. Erratic behavior not appropriate to a given situation or typically characteristic of the teenager.
8. Giving away cherished belongings.
9. Being obsessed with death and dying.

A few more tips.

- Be available and present
- Start with non-controversial topics
- Communicate on your child's timeline, not yours
- Focus on listening, and not on trying to solve the problem (“tell me more about”, “what else...”)
- Stay calm

What if I'm worried my child might be feeling suicidal?

- Address the issue immediately, but stay calm.
- Name your concern. Don't worry that you might be "giving your child an idea" that he hasn't thought of.
- Avoid saying things like, "Don't think that way," or "You shouldn't feel that way" (This could be interpreted as being critical by your child)
- Avoid minimizing your child's feelings. Hearing your child articulate these ideas is SCARY but remember, if things are out in the open, you can help your child deal with them.
- Work with your child to get professional help.

Final thoughts?

- The adolescent brain is changing. It is a time where significant neural pathways are developing and they may not all be working correctly.
- Connecting with friends more and parents less is not an unnatural stage in development.
- You are always able to talk to the school for assistance and more information.