

## Topic of the Month

Free - Help Yourself!



**Sleep is an absolute necessity for everyone's health, even invincible teenagers.**

But for them, getting restorative sleep can be made difficult by a couple of variables: 1) their internal clock is set later than the world will allow them to run, and 2) they may be worsening this "night owl" phase of their lives by consuming caffeine and looking at electronic screens. According to the National Sleep Foundation, only 15% of teens are getting at least 8 1/2 hours of sleep on school nights.

Sleep deprivation can contribute to the symptoms of the "terrible teens":

- Difficulty with school work
- Acne outbreaks,
- Crabby, depressed, or aggressive behavior,
- Worry or anxiety,
- Junk food cravings.

Consuming coffee, tea, pop, chocolate, or "energy drinks," can impact a person's ability to get to bed at a reasonable hour. Most adults are familiar with the vicious cycle of drinking too much caffeine, staying up too late, then being groggy during the day, and again turning to caffeine.

What's a teen (or anyone) to do?

1. Cut out caffeine, especially after noon.
2. Turn off screens at least an hour before you need to be in bed.
3. Avoid naps that are too long or too late in the day.
4. Keep bedrooms dark, cool, & quiet.
5. Get enough exercise during the day. Bodies rest better when they have something to rest up from!

More information on teens and sleep can be found at:

[www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-topics/teens-and-sleep](http://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-topics/teens-and-sleep)

# The Teen Years

They may be a roller coaster, but you can still enjoy the ride!

**O**r at least some of it. ;-)  
During adolescence, teens are developing their identities and preparing for adulthood. As their needs and capabilities change, teens and their parents often have to recalibrate relationships "on the fly."



**Growth occurs in bursts and can happen at different speeds in different areas.**

**Physical** - Teens' bodies morph, seemingly overnight, into those of adults. To fuel this high speed growth, they need plenty of wholesome food and 8 - 10 hours of sleep each night. Most kids reach their adult height and weight by the time they're 15 - 17 years old, but they're usually physically capable of getting someone pregnant or becoming pregnant well before that time.

**Intellectual** - Most early adolescents view their world as being pretty black & white, and they focus on the here and now. By late adolescence however, they're better able to understand that life is made up of lots of "grey" areas, and they're better able to think about the future. But because their brains won't be fully developed until they reach their mid-20s, teens aren't always able to quickly use these developing abilities.

**Emotional** - While they crave independence and can look like adults, they don't always feel grown on the inside. Teens often still need and want parental attention, but don't always feel good about wanting that. This can lead to confusion for teens and parents alike.

**Social** - Before puberty, a child's life was focused mainly on his/her family. Hitting the teen years shifts that focus outward, to friends and acquaintances. They often start feeling attracted to other people and falling in (and out) of love. Teens typically want to feel like an independent person, while at the same time wishing desperately to fit in with peers.

If you'd like to know more about teen brain development and how parents can help their kids during this challenging time, go to: [www.vimeo.com/98436818](http://www.vimeo.com/98436818)

**This is a time of growth and conflicting emotions for parents, too.**

Parents are trying to ride the waves of their children's whirling emotional needs. At the same time, they may be wrestling with their own conflicting emotions. It's common for parents to feel both pride, as their baby becomes more and more capable and independent, and loss, as their biggest fan retreats farther and farther away. Here are some tips to help parents assist their teens, while helping themselves navigate this exciting and difficult time! <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/Next-Stop-Adulthood-Tips-For-Parents.aspx>

Taking care of ourselves can take a lot of support. We're here to help! Ask a nurse or provider if you'd like to talk.

# Sex

**Just the thought of talking about “the birds and the bees” can strike fear into the heart of parents.**

But this subject is too important to ignore, delay, or hope that someone else takes care of it. Because someone else already is. Today’s hyper-connected teens are exposed to lots of sexual imagery, but virtually no sexual information. However, parents can use this to their advantage, by turning media messaging into teachable moments. This requires effort on the part of parents: monitoring what their children see in movies and online content, experiencing it together, and discussing it.

**Ideally, this won’t be your first time for “the talk.”** Having had frequent and comfortable conversations about bodies, sex, and values over the course of a child’s early years, makes it easier to have the higher-stakes teen-age conversations.

#### **Possible topics of conversation include:**

- Puberty and all the changes it brings
- How sexuality is portrayed in the media, and
- How it “works” in real life
  - devastating consequences that can result
  - positives and pleasures of responsible sexuality
- Urban myths, both old and new (i.e., pregnancy can result from toilet seats; oral or anal sex are without risks; withdrawal is effective at preventing pregnancy...)
- Specific and accurate information about the effectiveness and limitations of different types of birth control
- Sexual Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and their effects
- Pressuring someone about sex is never okay - for girls or boys. This includes pressure from peers or the media. It’s okay to say “NO,” even if they’ve said “Yes” before.
- The intersection of sex, sexual identity, and gender.

**How do you discuss such potentially hot topics** in a way that not only provides your teen with accurate information, but makes it more likely that they will reach out to you again?

- Admit to any discomfort. Not only does this give them permission to feel whatever they’re feeling, but it shows them that they are so important to you, you’re willing to be uncomfortable to take good care of them.
- Step off the soapbox, and listen as much as you talk. A discussion about sexual values, morals, and ethics feels very different from a lecture on those topics.
- Ask for help if you need. A religious leader, trusted family member, or one of Sawtooth Mountain Clinic’s providers or Behavioral Health Consultants can pitch in. You don’t have to do this alone.
- Remind your teen of your unconditional love. We’re all more likely to reach out and open up to someone that we know loves us - no matter what.

Sometimes parents worry that by talking about sex, it will make their kids want to try it. Teens have always been, and will always be, interested in sex, whether their parents talk about it or not. Your input matters and can help your teen make smart decisions. For more information, visit: [www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/dating-sex/](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/dating-sex/)



# Drugs

**Your rules may get broken.  
You should still set rules.**

Part of building your own identity is pushing against the identity that’s expected of you. For teens, this can mean testing the limits of parental and societal controls. Some limits-testing doesn’t have much impact (choice of clothes, hair style, or music), while some boundary-pushing can be deadly.

**Just like “the talk” about sex, make sure discussions about drug and alcohol use are commonplace and comfortable.**

When you want to talk about these topics in greater depth, give your teens some advanced notice, so they don’t feel ambushed or think they’re in trouble. Remind your teens that while alcohol is legal for adults to purchase, is heavily advertised, and is generally socially accepted, it’s still a powerful and potentially addicting drug. Underage drinkers are more likely to experience physical and sexual assaults, suicide and homicide, car crashes, and death from alcohol poisoning. Over 4,300 teens die each year from alcohol use.

**Set up clear rules, with clear consequences, that are supported by clear reasons.** This helps your teen know where you stand, and gives them an “out” for dealing with peer pressure. Being able to say, “No thanks. If my parents ever found out, I’d never get to leave the house again” can buy your teens time and help them save face. By discussing your reasoning, you can invite them into the conversation, instead of just lecturing at them.

**Speak to them like you’d want to be spoken to.** Nobody likes to feel bossed around or scolded. Remind them they are the ones that will have to make the final decision about drug and alcohol use, and they’re also the ones that will have to deal with any repercussions of those decisions - both in the short and long term. Give them a chance to speak and to feel heard.

**What about your own experiences?** Perhaps you made choices as a young person that you’d rather your child not repeat. Do you tell them about that or keep it private? One option is to minimally share without glamorizing your experience. Another option is to let them know that what happened in the past really isn’t relevant to the here and now. Your job, in this present moment, is to keep them safe, and the rules of “No drinking. No drugs.” help keep them safe.

**Let them know you’ve got their backs: any time, any place, you will come pick them up, no questions asked.** The next day, when everyone is calm and rested, is the time for the important conversation about their drinking or drug use and safety.

For more information about how to talk to your teen about these subjects, check out [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org) or [www.childmind.org/article/talk-teenager-substance-use-abuse/](http://www.childmind.org/article/talk-teenager-substance-use-abuse/). Sawtooth Mountain Clinic has Behavioral Health Consultants on staff that can help you and your family with these and other topics. [www.sawtoothmountainclinic.org/our-clinic/our-programs/behavioral-health/](http://www.sawtoothmountainclinic.org/our-clinic/our-programs/behavioral-health/)

