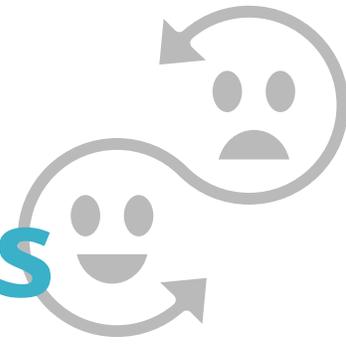




CENTER FOR PARENT & TEEN
COMMUNICATION

5 Facts About Teen Emotions



1

Adolescence is a unique and exciting time for emotional development

- Adolescence is a time of **intense emotions** because the emotion centers of the brain are growing rapidly.
- Teens may experience **more extreme emotional highs and lows** because they face more responsibilities and challenges. Learning to feel and process a wide range of emotions is crucial.
- **Parental love and guidance** remain key even as peer relationships take on greater emotional importance.

2

Emotions develop in stages based on age and experience

- **Pre-teens** (about 11-12 years old) experiencing the first changes of puberty may feel awkward or self-conscious. Or they may feel excited about getting taller or gaining muscle. They may compare themselves to peers as they adjust to their changing body.
- **Young teens** (about 13-16 years old) are developing their ability to process different emotional reactions. They may have strong emotions – both good and bad – to social situations. They may want to figure out things for themselves, rather than immediately getting advice from an adult.
- **Older teens and young adults** (about 17-21 years old) are beginning to develop more sophisticated planning and problem-solving skills, helping them navigate emotions. They may begin shifting focus from peer groups to individual relationships.

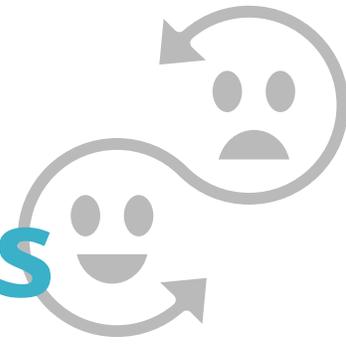
3

Teens are learning how to explore their emotions

- Teens are developing their ability to **name, process, and release** their feelings.
- Parents are **essential role models** for teens. Teens mirror parents' emotional reactions; if parents are calm in heated moments, teens more likely will be as well.
- It's normal for teens to sometimes **express their strongest emotions** to the adults they are closest to. This is because they know they can express all of their feelings – good and uncomfortable – in the safety of a trusted relationship.



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4

Teens are learning how to express their emotions

- Teens need to learn to **express emotions** regularly so that stress does not build up inside.
- If parents try to shield teens entirely from pain or sadness, they risk diminishing their teens' ability to manage a full range of emotions. **Experiencing and learning to manage** a bit of pain builds resolve, compassion, and resilience.
- Teens **struggling to process their emotions** may turn to drugs or other temporary and potentially harmful escapes to instead hide or bottle up their feelings. This may signal teens need support to cope with stress.

5

Emotional distress may look different in teens than adults

- **Signs of depression** include sadness, weight change, trouble sleeping, lack of energy, disinterest in activities, substance use, and thoughts of harming themselves. It is critical to note it may look like anger and rage in teens even without sadness.
- **Signs of anxiety** in teens may include repeated worries about routine parts of life, excessive irritability, trouble sleeping or concentrating, and frequent physical complaints like headaches or fatigue. Anxiety in teens can be biologically rooted or driven by unrealistic expectations from adults, peer pressure, increasing school and home responsibilities, and an uncertain world.
- **Talk of suicide** should always be taken seriously and never ignored or dismissed. Asking about feelings of suicide does NOT increase the risk of suicide, it positions you to help. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 (TALK). Crisis Text Line: Text START to 741-741.



Approximately 1.5 million US teens have a depression diagnosis, with older teens (15-17 years old) and young women at the greatest risk of major depressive episodes.

Approximately 2.6 million teens have an anxiety diagnosis. Nearly 1 in 3 teens will experience an anxiety disorder.

Source: CDC/NIMH