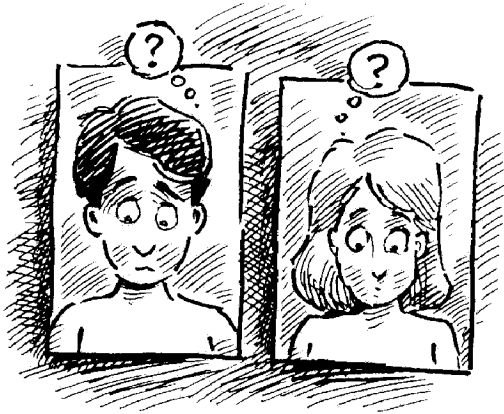


2.

Teens are in transition.

1. The most significant period of change

Only menopause and toddler-hood compare to adolescence for the amount of change that goes on. While neither is as severe both get more attention. There are books, magazines, courses and clinics to help people through these life changes with the minimum of negative impact.



Adolescence, the greatest time of change in life, is experienced at a time when (unlike the toddler) the subject knows what is going on and (unlike the menopausal woman) does not have the weight of life experience to provide coping skills. The impact of these changes lead to great deal of frustration, for both adolescents and the people around them.

It is also more difficult for our kids because there are few rewards to make the frustration worthwhile. Where it was once normal for the functions, size and confidence that arrived with adolescence to be exercised in adult ways, today's teens are expected to deal with these new grown up abilities in a children's playground.

Other cultures had (and have) 'Rites of Passage' ceremonies and events that declared to the child and the community that the teen qualified to accept adult responsibilities and undertake adult activities.

This introduced a status that allowed them to see the physical and emotional changes as tools of adulthood. Without this the best for our kids is to see them as tools of experimentation and rebellion. In summary, other societies make their adolescents apprentice adults, we keep ours as delayed children.

2. Physical Changes

Western children are entering adolescence much earlier (between 8 and 12 for girls and between 11 and 14 for boys). There is much speculation about the causal factors in this (better nutrition, increased body weight, brain responses to the prolonged exposure to graphic sexual imagery). Regardless of the cause the reality is that our children are entering puberty well before many of them have the maturity to properly cope with it.

Plus, in this electronic age where every real and imagined experience is piped in living colour into every home, kids are much more aware of body change and hence fascinated, concerned and competitive about it.

While every child changes differently there is one absolute certainty: every child will go through significant periods when it believes that it is the only one who looks this way, that it is the freak.

3. Intellectual Changes

An equally powerful set of changes that is much less recognised or expected is in the way kids think. Children process information by learning and repeating. They see adults in their lives as sources of wisdom through whom they can learn. Adolescents take what they learn, compare it to what they observe and make their own conclusions. They perceive adults to be proponents of information that may or may not be true, but regardless is open to challenge. Where a child's question might be "Why?" an adolescent's is far more likely to be "Why not?"

Consequently parents who are dictatorial or adversarial will often see a rapidly diminishing influence on their children during adolescence. Teens need the space to disagree with their parents and the time to test their new ideas. Where they are given latitude to do this unnecessary conflict is avoided and they progress to mature thinking more rapidly.

4. The imaginary audience

The consequence of all this change is that kids are often chronically impacted by what the psychologist David Elkind called the Imaginary Audience. This is where you believe that people around you are thinking what you think they are thinking about you. Much of the adolescent behaviour, especially stubbornness and silliness, that so frustrates parents stems from the fact that the teen is playing up to this perceived set of spectators or doing everything possible to avoid being embarrassed in front of them.

For further reflection and action ...

1. Complete the following sentence by placing an 'X' on the line below:

Most of the time I treat my child like a(n)--

Child

Adult

2. What changes have you noticed in your child--

physically? _____

intellectually? _____

socially? _____

emotionally? _____

spiritually? _____
