

# Family Living Focus

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Do you have an "early adolescent" or pre-teen in your family? These are children between the ages of 10-15.

Are you asking, "What is happening to my child?" "Where is my child who enjoyed family outings, was happy, obeyed rules, and talked to me?"

- Does your pre teen:
- Spend hours in his room with the door closed?
  - Does not want to "be seen" with parents.
  - Spend hours on the phone but won't talk to parents?
  - Get moody and question everything he's asked to do?
  - Not study because it's not "cool" to be an honor student?
  - Spend hours primping and putting on tons of make up?

Your pre-teen may do any one of these things due to the complex changes taking place in growth at this time. This age group has been described as "Toddlers with Hormones", "Half Kid-Half Adult", and "Hormones in Sneakers". There are dramatic physical, emotional, mental and social changes taking place. Early adolescence is "normal". It can be a challenging time for parents, but not impossible. After all, look at the number of people who successfully get through this stage.

Physical changes are quite evident during these years. Physical growth is very uneven. Different parts of the body may grow while the other parts may not. The ears and nose may get bigger but the face doesn't. Hands and feet reach adult size before the rest of the body making the child appear to be clumsy and awkward while learning to adjust to the new body. Think of their problems you would have if your feet grew from size 6 to size 9 in the next 6 months! Understanding these changes may help you be more tolerant of your awkward child.

Fatigue is also a problem for many pre teens. A growing and changing body uses a great deal of energy. So if your child seems to have a bottomless pit in his stomach, he needs the extra food. Puberty is a key physical change caused by hormones. Girls and boys who develop their secondary sex characteristics early are often the social leaders and sex-role models. Late bloomers often feel left out and try to compensate by modeling the dress, make-up, and mannerisms of their more physically mature friends. They have a strong need to fit "in".

Hormones also cause emotional changes. Fluctuation of

moods, temper tantrums, irrational fears, and preoccupation with sexual feelings are all enhanced during this time. Early adolescents may be described as belligerent, reasonable, argumentative, understanding, lethargic, enthusiastic, rude, thoughtful—depending on the day or even the time of day. These mood changes are normal and a part of the maturation process.

They also have feelings of confusion as to whether they are an adult or a child. They are very self conscious and feel that "Everyone is watching me".

One of the most difficult behaviors for parents to accept is the growing independence as the adolescent moves away from parents to peers. Remember, just because peers increase in their importance does not mean that the importance of parents decreases. They still need your encouragement and support as they struggle for independence. During this struggle the adolescent may develop a cocksure attitude, think their parents are impossible at times, bring home little information from school, and may be ashamed of the old-fashioned ways of their parents, saying "When I was your age..." doesn't cut it with adolescents. If you think about it—things are different today!

The 9 to 13 year old tends to group together in "gangs" of the same sex and age. They form secret clubs and do secretive things that adults must not know about. These clubs have definite rules for belonging. During the latter part of this age they become interested in the opposite sex and start "going with" someone. "Going with" may mean talking

on the phone, eating lunch together, walking to class, meeting at the mall, etc.

The early adolescent also is developing the ability to do more thinking "in the head". They may question old beliefs, family values, and criticize the adults in their lives. They ask why and want proof. As a result parents may see them as argumentative. They also think they are infallible. They feel unique and special and that nothing can happen to them. "Other kids may get in trouble when they use drugs, skip school or have sex, but not me."

The thing to remember is that each child grows at his or her own rate and these changes occur over a time span of several years. Knowing what to expect can help both you and your early adolescent get through this challenging age span.

Here are some ways of coping with the adolescent years.

- Keep lines of communication open. Learn to use "I" messages rather than "you" statements.

- Learn to talk with each other not at each other.

- Learn to listen. Listen for feelings behind what is being said.

- Communicate your trust and confidence to your child.

- Share your values about money, sex, drugs, religion, etc. Be a role model.

- Give lots of compliments. Avoid put-downs, nagging and needless criticism.

- Use a family meeting format to establish mutually agreed upon rules and consequences.

- Allow the child the freedom to make some personal decisions and mistakes.

- Nurture a good sense of humor.

- When things get out of control, get HELP!

## Food Workshops

**LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.)** — The following workshops will be held in the Extension Training Room of the Farm and Home Center, 1383 Arcadia Road, Lancaster. For registration information, call the Lancaster County office of Penn State Cooperative Extension at (717) 394-6851.

**Facts about Fat and Food Labels** - Information about different kinds of fat in food and how to use the new food labels to shop more healthfully. Instructor: Althea Engle, M.S., R.D., Extension Agent, Family Living/Food and Nutrition. Cost: Free. October 5, 9:30-10:30 a.m. or October 27, 7:30-8:30 p.m.

**Lowfat Desserts** - For special occasions and everyday meals or snacks, desserts can be made that are lower in fat and have eye and taste appeal. Samples are included. Instructor: Althea Engle, M.S., R.D., Extension Agent, Family Living/Food and Nutrition. Cost \$3.00. November 3, 7:00-8:30 p.m. or November 9, 9:30-11:00 a.m.

**Fruits and Vegetables: How to Cook and Use the Winter Squashes and Autumn Vegetables and Fruits** - Instructor: Althea Engle, M.S., R.D., Extension Agent, Family Living/Food and Nutrition. Cost: \$2.50. October 26, 9:30-11:00 a.m. or November 1, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

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