

Family Living

Focus

by
Janice Stoudnour

Bedford County
Cooperative Extension



through this stage three times, I can attest that each child exhibits different characteristics in their own timeline. Just when you think you have them figured out, they'll change and begin a new behavior. (Isn't parenting wonderful!) Many children will start this developmental process at the age of nine; others may never exhibit any of these qualities.

As parents, there are certain survival skills that we have to follow for everyone to successfully get through this stage of development. First of all, it usually hits us at one of our most vulnerable times in life. We are in the stage of "getting older" as well. Think about it—most of us have just hit midlife! All of a sudden life seems to be moving too fast. I find myself looking at my youngest son, who will be 16 in two months, wondering where all the years went by. It seems as though he was just beginning kindergarten yesterday—now he wants to buy a car and critiques my driving skills.

On the other end of the life-line are my parents who are celebrating their 51st wedding anniversary this month. As parents, at this stage we are sometimes referred to as the "sandwich" generation. You not only have to deal with your children being adults in training wheels, but your parents are nearing the age where you may need to care for them as well. Forget your midlife crisis, you don't really have the time or energy to deal with it. You must move with the direction your family is going.

There is a certain reality about life at this point that impacts you as a parent that you may have experienced before. Retirement planning becomes a tool that really should be considered, physical activity and nutritious eating habits need to be addressed, women are faced with the end of their reproductive years, and questions like, "Have I fulfilled my dreams and goals in life?" often cross our minds.

Taking all of this into consideration, no wonder it bothers us so much that this wonderful mild mannered child of yesterday is now staring us in the face and stating in no uncertain terms that he can make his own decisions and is no longer a child. Maybe we parents should cry, "No fair!" After all, we are going through developmental changes too!

Regardless, the bottom line is that we are the parents, and we too shall get through this stage keeping the family intact. How do you do this? Patience, perseverance, and communication. Recognizing what is happening and exploring all the options as best you can will help everyone through this challenging stage of your family's life. Understanding what happens at certain ages can help parents guide their children more effectively as they turn into those happy, independent adults we all want them to be. Welcome to the stage of adolescence!

I often hear parents talk about their children "changing" around the age of ten. It is not only the outward physical changes that they are noticing, but there is definitely an emotional change that is going on inside their child. The frustrating thing is that it almost seems as though this wonderful child just woke up one morning with an "attitude." If you are a parent of an adolescent, you know what I am talking about.

moodiness and sensitivity (girls cry for seemingly little reason), arguing (they feel they are being perfectly logical—you on the other hand think they are "talking back"), explosive with anger, self-centered, resists doing household chores, and goes to extremes with emotions—loves or hates, worries about appearance, needs privacy, and feeling that "no one understands."

Not all adolescents will experience all of these characteristics nor will they experience them all at one time. As a mother of three who has gone

Some of the new characteristics that often accompany the adolescent stage are increased

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