

JOHN CROCKETT, M.D.
FAMILY PRACTICE AND OB/GYN

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12 to 18 years

Your child's wellbeing always remains top priority in our office. We are here to support and answer your questions as your child grows. Please call us anytime with your concerns, or use our patient portal to contact us online. This is a guideline for developmental milestones for your child. Remember, children develop at different rates, and this is only a guideline.

During adolescence, children develop the ability to:

- Comprehend abstract content, such as higher mathematic concepts, and develop moral philosophies, including rights and privileges
- Establish and maintain personal relationships by learning to share intimacy without inhibition or dread
- Move gradually towards a more mature sense of identity and purpose
- Question old values without a sense of dread or loss of identity

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Adolescence is characterized by dramatic physical changes moving the individual from childhood into physical maturity.
- Girls may begin to develop breast buds as early as 8 years old, with full breast development achieved anywhere from 12 to 18 years. Pubic hair growth -- as well as armpit and leg hair -- typically begins at about age 9 or 10, and reaches adult distribution patterns at about 13 to 14 years.
- Menarche (the beginning of menstrual periods) typically occurs about 2 years after initial pubescent changes are noted. It may occur as early as 10 years, or as late as 15 years. A rapid growth in height occurs for girls between the ages of about 9.5 and 14.5 years, peaking somewhere around 12 years.
- Boys may begin to notice enlargement of the testicles and scrotum as early as 9 years of age, followed closely by lengthening of the penis. Adult size and shape of the genitals is typically reached by age 16 to 17 years. Pubic hair growth -- as well as armpit, leg, chest, and facial hair -- begins in boys at about age 12, and reaches adult distribution patterns at about 15 to 16 years.
- A rapid growth in height occurs for boys between the ages of about 10.5 to 11 and 16 to 18, peaking around age 14. The appearance of regular nocturnal emissions (wet dreams) marks the onset of puberty in boys and typically occurs between the ages of 13 and 17 years, with the average about 14.5 years.
- Voice change in boys typically occurs along with penile growth.

BEHAVIOR

- The sudden and rapid physical changes that adolescents experience typically lend this period of development to be one of self-consciousness, sensitivity and concern over one's own body changes.
- Because physical changes may not occur in a smooth, regular schedule, adolescents may go through stages of awkwardness, both in terms of appearance and physical mobility and coordination.
- During adolescence, it is appropriate for youngsters to begin to separate from their parents and establish an individual identity. In some cases, this may occur with minimal reaction on the part of all involved. In some families, significant conflict may arise over the adolescent's acts or gestures of rebellion, and the parents' needs to maintain control and have the youth comply.
- As adolescents pull away from parents in a search for identity, the peer group takes on a special significance.
- In early adolescence, the peer group usually consists of non-romantic friendships, often including "cliques," gangs, or clubs. Members of the group often attempt to behave alike, dress alike, have secret codes or rituals, and participate in the same activities. As the youth moves into mid-adolescence (14 to 16 years) and beyond, the peer group expands to include romantic friendships.
- Mid-to-late adolescence is characterized by a need to establish sexual identity through becoming comfortable with one's own body and sexual feelings. Through romantic friendships, dating, and experimentation, adolescents learn to express and receive intimate or sexual advances in a comfortable manner that is consistent with internalized values. Young people who do not have the opportunity for such experiences may demonstrate difficulty in establishing intimate relationships into adulthood.

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- Adolescents typically demonstrate behaviors consistent with several myths of adolescence:
 - The first myth is that they are "on stage" with the attention of others constantly centered upon their appearance or actions. This normal self-centeredness may appear (especially to adults) to border on paranoia, narcissism, or even hysteria.
 - Another myth of adolescence is that of the indestructible self. This belief feeds the notion that "it will never happen to me, only the other person".

SAFETY

- Adolescent safety issues stem from increased strength and agility that may develop before they've developed good decision-making skills. A strong need for peer approval may entice a young person to attempt hazardous feats, or participate in a variety of risk-taking behaviors.
- Appropriate motor vehicle safety should be emphasized, focusing on the roles of driver/passenger/pedestrian, substance abuse, and seat belt use. Privileges associated with cars and recreational motor vehicles should depend on the adolescent's ability to demonstrate safe use.
- Adolescents involved in recreational athletic activities should be taught to use adequate equipment, protective gear or clothing, safe facilities, proper rules of safe play, and rational approaches to activities.
- Young people need to be acutely aware of the potential dangers -- including sudden death -- which may occur not only with regular substance abuse, but even experimental use of drugs and alcohol.
- Adolescents who are allowed to use or have access to firearms need to learn proper use, safety, and legal requirements associated with guns.
- If adolescents appear to be isolated from peers, uninterested in school or social activities, or deteriorating in performance at school, work, or sports -- psychological evaluation may be necessary.
- Many adolescents are at increased risk for depression and potential suicide attempts, due to pressures and conflicts that may arise within families, school or social organizations, and intimate relationships.

PARENTING TIPS

- Adolescents usually require privacy in which to contemplate the changes taking place. Ideally, the youth should be allowed to have a private bedroom. If not possible, some private space should be allotted.
- Teasing an adolescent child about physical changes is inappropriate, because it may cause self-consciousness and embarrassment.
- Parents need to remember that the adolescent's interest in body changes and sexual topics is natural, normal development and does not necessarily indicate movement into sexual activity.
- The teenager's quest for independence is normal development and need not be seen by the parent as rejection or a loss of control over the child. To be of most benefit to the growing adolescent, a parent needs to be a constant and consistent figure, available as a sounding board for the youth's ideas without dominating or overtaking the emerging, independent identity of the young person.
- Despite adolescents constantly challenging authority figures, they need or want limit-setting, as it provides a safe boundary in which to grow and function.
- Parents can anticipate their authority to be repeatedly challenged, as children enter and move through their adolescent years. Maintaining open lines of communication and clear, yet negotiable, limits or boundaries may prove useful in minimizing major conflicts.
- Most parents report a sense of increased wisdom and self-growth as they rise to the challenges of parenting adolescents.

Please see the following link for recommended vaccines for your teenager:

<http://www.immunize.org/catg.d/p4050.pdf>