



EMPOWERING PARENTS TO RAISE  
THEIR CHILDREN TO BE SUBSTANCE-FREE

Talk Early And Often About Alcohol, Tobacco And Other Drugs. Even When It Gets Tough

## Know! Puberty is a Brain-Changer

Cracking voices, body odor and wild mood swings - all indicators of the long-awaited and sometimes dreaded period in every adolescents' life - we're talking *puberty*. Most youth are well-aware of the physical changes they can expect their bodies to go through, but do they know the impact of puberty on their brains? Are your children aware that all these hormonal changes affect the way they feel, think and act? If not, it is important to have the other half of, "the talk" with your child.

Biologically speaking, puberty begins when the brain signals the release of certain hormones into the bloodstream. This typically occurs somewhere between the ages of 8 to 14 for girls, and 11 to 17 for boys. The onset of puberty varies greatly among individuals and is a process that can take years. Regardless of gender or age however, puberty causes dramatic changes to the brain. Youth need to be aware of the mental and emotional changes that accompany puberty, along with healthy ways to cope with the rollercoaster ride of ups and downs.

### Let your child know that they are likely to experience a number of new feelings and emotions during puberty:

**Feeling Sensitive:** Their body is changing and they may feel awkward and self-conscious about it. They may feel extra-sensitive when someone criticizes or teases them. It may take very little to set them off and they may question if what they are feeling is "normal." They may also feel like no one understands them.

**Intense Emotions:** Their emotions are likely to become stronger and more intense. What used to be a "like" is now a "love!" What used to be a dislike is now a "hate!" What used to be a "little envy" is now "extreme jealousy."

**Mood Swings:** Their emotions seem to flip-flop back and forth. They may be laughing and seemingly feeling happy one minute, then they are suddenly in tears and immensely sad the next. They may be getting along just fine with siblings, then out of nowhere they are screaming at them.

**Romantic Feelings:** While they may have had a romantic thought or two about another person before, the way they feel now is different, more intense. Or, having romantic feelings and thoughts may be a completely new experience for them altogether.

**Conflict:** They may begin to have stronger opinions or opinions that are independent from family members. This may cause them to question family rules and values. They may seek more freedom and space, which may lead to conflict with parents, friends or others.

Reassure your child that all of this is a natural part of growing up and that none of these feelings or emotions make him/her strange or weird.

In addition to reassuring children, you can help by sharing healthy ways for them to cope with the stress of puberty. Remind them that they are not alone and that even

Talking regularly with kids about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using.

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peers who appear to be sailing smoothly through puberty are likely struggling with the same feelings. Encourage them to gather more information on the topic, because like anything else, knowing the facts can make it less challenging to go through. Remind them that you are there for them, ready to listen, ready to answer questions and ready to provide guidance (if asked). For the times they prefer to talk to someone other than mom or dad, encourage them to reach out to a trusted friend who is a good listener and will allow them to vent and get things off their chest. Many adolescents find that hanging out with their friends, writing, drawing, getting active or even just sitting back listening to music serve as a great stress-relievers.

While puberty typically brings to mind the changing of one's outward appearance, there are big changes occurring inwardly as well. While it is important to give your growing adolescent some space and increased freedom, it is also important to make it clear that you are still right there for him/her, providing information, encouragement and support.

Sources: [PBS Kids: Puberty – Brain Changes, Strange Changes](#). [Seven Counties Services, Inc., Angela Oswald, MSW, edited by Mark Dombeck, Ph.D.: Mental/Emotional/Social Changes through Puberty.](#)