



Adapted by Cat Gander from  
*Helping Children Thrive*

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# You & Your Teenager



Teenagers are not children but they are not adults either. They mature and their brains grow a lot between the ages of 12 and 20. The parts of their brains that change during this time are involved in decision making, self-awareness, impulse control, and emotional control. Thus, teens still have a lot to learn about problem solving, controlling emotions, understanding how others think of them, and assessing the motives of others.

## Normal behaviours for teenagers

Which things do you see in your child so far?

- Increased independence from family, especially for social activities
- More likely to challenge you when you try to impose rules
- Wants more freedom but may not be taking on more responsibility
- May be embarrassed to be seen with a parent in public, may value friends more than family
- Obsessed with own appearance, clothes, music, gadgets, etc and how to get the money to buy these things
- Dramatic mood changes brought on by puberty
- Interest in dating and relationships grows
- Friends and the need for acceptance by friends are very important
- They may not always make good choices about friends and risky behaviour such as drugs
- Does things impulsively without thinking through consequences
- Dramatic physical changes brought on by puberty

## How to help your teen

- Tell them and show them you love them, and do not blame them for anything that happened
- Take responsibility for the decision to leave (if you and your partner have separated)
- Let them know you are there to talk when they are ready
- Negotiate clear rules and consequences that are appropriate for their age
- Don't rely on them for emotional support: seek out friends, family or professionals for that
- Take some time to do teenage appropriate activities together, particularly if there are younger children
- Take care of yourself and make time that is just for you



## Effects of violence at home

When a teenager has seen violence at home, they may...

- try and intervene in violent incidents to protect their mother
- be embarrassed by their family and reluctant to bring their friends home
- fantasize about leaving home or actually leave home
- adopt unhealthy coping strategies such as drug use or early sexual activity
- blame you for not protecting them or siblings
- feel responsible for taking care of younger brothers and sisters, to keep them safe
- have difficulty establishing healthy dating relationships or avoid intimacy
- start to stereotype males as perpetrators and females as victims if the abusive relationship has been heterosexual

## What your teen may be feeling

### Relief

- Relief the abuser is out of your life, out of their life and away from younger siblings

### Anger

- Anger that you did not leave sooner

## What your teen may be feeling (continued)

- Anger that you did not protect yourself from abuse
- Anger if you did not protect them from maltreatment
- Anger that their whole life has been turned upside down
- Anger that their teenage issues have been swept aside by focus on violence

### Worry

- Worry you might go back to the abusive relationship, especially if you have reconciled before
- Worry you might start dating a new abuser, if you have done that before

### Concern

- Concern that you are sad and upset
- Concern about the well-being of younger brothers and sisters

### Vengeful

- Fantasizing about taking revenge against abuser

### Confusion

- Confused by how to re-assume role of 'child' after being caretaker of other siblings

All these feelings and beliefs are all normal reactions of teenagers to the situation