

# CERTIFIED CHILDREN'S HEALTH COUNSELOR ONLINE COURSE SESSION 13:

## When hormones kick in: Taking care of their own body

You've lived through 2 a.m. feedings, toddler temper tantrums, and the back-to-school blues. So why is the word "teenager" causing you so much worry?



When you consider that the teen years are a period of intense growth, not only physically but emotionally and intellectually, it's understandable that it's a time of confusion and upheaval for many families.

Despite some adults' negative perceptions about teens, they are often energetic, thoughtful, and idealistic, with a deep interest in what's fair and right. So, although it can be a period of conflict between parent and child, the teen years are also a time to help kids grow into the distinct individuals they will become.

### **Understanding the Teen Years**

So when does adolescence start? Everybody's different — there are early bloomers, late arrivers, speedy developers, and slow-but-steady growers. In other words, there's a wide range of what's considered normal.

But it's important to make a (somewhat artificial) distinction between puberty and adolescence. Most of us think of puberty as the development of adult sexual characteristics: breasts, menstrual periods, pubic hair, and facial hair. These are certainly the most visible signs of puberty and impending adulthood, but kids who are showing physical changes (between the ages of 8 and 14 or so) also can be going through a bunch of changes that aren't readily seen from the outside. These are the changes of adolescence.

Many kids announce the onset of adolescence with a dramatic change in behavior around their parents. They're starting to separate from mom and dad and become more independent. At the same time, kids this age are increasingly aware of how others, especially their peers, see them and are desperately trying to fit in. Their peers often become much more important than parents as far as making decisions.

Kids often start "trying on" different looks and identities, and they become very aware of how they differ from their peers, which can result in episodes of distress and conflict with parents.

### **Butting Heads**

One of the common stereotypes of adolescence is the rebellious, wild teen continually at odds with mom and dad. Although it may be the case for some kids and this *is* a time of emotional ups and downs, that stereotype certainly is *not* representative of most teens.

But the primary goal of the teen years is to achieve independence. To do this, teens must start pulling away from their parents — especially the parent whom they're the closest to. This can feel like teens are always at odds with parents or don't want to be around them the way they used to.

As teens mature, they start to think more abstractly and rationally. They're forming their moral code. And parents of teens may find that kids who previously had been willing to conform to please them will suddenly begin asserting themselves — and their opinions — strongly and rebelling against parental control.

You may need to look closely at how much room you give your teen to be an individual and ask yourself questions such as: "Am I a controlling parent?," "Do I listen to my child?," and "Do I allow my teen's opinions and tastes to differ from my own?"

## **Tips for Parenting during the Teen Years**

Looking for a roadmap to find your way through these years? Here are some tips:

### **Educate Yourself**

Read books about teenagers. Think back on your own teen years. Remember your struggles with acne or your embarrassment at developing early — or late. Expect some mood changes in your typically sunny child, and be prepared for more conflict as he or she matures as an individual. Parents who know what's coming can cope with it better. And the more you know, the better you can prepare.

### **Talk to Kids Early and Often**

Starting to talk about menstruation or wet dreams after they've already begun is starting too late. Answer the early questions kids have about bodies, such as the differences between boys and girls and where babies come from. But don't overload them with information — just answer their questions. If you don't know the answers, get them from someone who does, like a trusted friend or your pediatrician.

You know your kids. You can hear when your child's starting to tell jokes about sex or when attention to personal appearance is increasing. This is a good time to jump in with your own questions such as:

- Are you noticing any changes in your body?
- Are you having any strange feelings?
- Are you sad sometimes and don't know why?

A yearly physical exam is a great time to talk about this. A doctor can tell your preadolescent — and you — what to expect in the next few years. An exam can be a jumping-off point for a good parent/child discussion. The later you wait to have these talks, the more likely your child will be to form misconceptions or become embarrassed about or afraid of physical and emotional changes. And the earlier you open the lines of communication, the better your chances of keeping them open through the teen years. Give your child books on puberty written for kids going through it. Share memories of your own adolescence. There's nothing like knowing that mom or dad went through it, too, to put kids more at ease.

### **Put Yourself in Your Child's Place**

Practice empathy by helping your child understand that it's normal to be a bit concerned or self-conscious, and that it's OK to feel grown-up one minute and like a kid the next.

### **Pick Your Battles**

If teenagers want to dye their hair, paint their fingernails black, or wear funky clothes, think twice before you object. Teens want to shock their parents and it's a lot better to let them do something temporary and harmless; save your objections for things that really matter, like tobacco, drugs and alcohol, or permanent changes to their appearance.

Ask why your teen wants to dress or look a certain way and try to understand how your teen is feeling. You also might want to discuss how others might perceive them if they look different — help your teen understand how he or she might be viewed.

### **Set Expectations**

Teens might act unhappy about the expectations their parents place on them. Still, they usually understand and need to know that their parents care enough about them to expect certain things such as good grades, acceptable behavior, and sticking to the house rules. If parents have appropriate expectations, teens will likely try to meet them. Without reasonable expectations, your teen may feel you don't care about him or her.

### **Inform Your Teen — and Stay Informed Yourself**

The teen years often are a time of experimentation, and sometimes that experimentation includes risky behaviors. Don't avoid the subjects of sex and drug, alcohol, or tobacco use. Discussing tough topics openly with kids before they're exposed to them actually makes it more likely that they'll act responsibly when the time comes. Share your family values with your teen and talk about what you believe is right and wrong, and why.

Know your child's friends — and know their friends' parents. Regular communication between parents can go a long way toward creating a safe environment for all teens in a peer group. Parents can help each other keep track of the kids' activities without making the kids feel that they're being watched.

### **Know the Warning Signs**

A certain amount of change is normal during the teen years. But too drastic or long-lasting a switch in personality or behavior may signal real trouble — the kind that needs professional help. Watch for these warning signs:

- extreme weight gain or loss
- sleep problems
- rapid, drastic changes in personality
- sudden change in friends
- skipping school often
- falling grades
- talk or even jokes about suicide
- signs of tobacco, alcohol, or drug use
- run-ins with the law

Any other inappropriate behavior that lasts for more than 6 weeks can be a sign of underlying trouble, too. You may expect a glitch or two in your teen's behavior or grades during this time, but your A/B student shouldn't suddenly be failing, and your normally outgoing kid shouldn't suddenly become constantly withdrawn. Your doctor or a local counselor, psychologist, or psychiatrist can help you find proper counseling.

### **Respect Kids' Privacy**

Some parents, understandably, have a very hard time with this one. They may feel that anything their kids do is their business. But to help your teen become a young adult, you'll need to grant some privacy. If you notice warning signs of trouble, then you can invade your child's privacy until you get to the heart of the problem. But otherwise, it's a good idea to back off.

In other words, your teenager's room, texts, e-mails, and phone calls should be private. You also shouldn't expect your teen to share all thoughts or activities with you at all

times. Of course, for safety reasons, you should always know where teens are going, when they'll be returning, what they're doing, and with whom, but you don't need to know every detail. And you definitely shouldn't expect to be invited along!

Start with trust. Tell your teen that you trust him or her, but if the trust gets broken, he or she will enjoy fewer freedoms until it's rebuilt.

### **Monitor What Kids See and Read**

TV shows, magazines and books, the Internet — kids have access to tons of information. Be aware of what yours watch and read. Don't be afraid to set limits on the amount of time spent in front of the computer or the TV. Know what they're learning from the media and who they may be communicating with online.

Teens shouldn't have unlimited access to TV or the Internet in private — these should be public activities. Access to technology also should be limited after certain hours (for example, 10 p.m. or so) to encourage adequate sleep. It's not unreasonable to have cellphones and computers off limits after a certain time.

### **Make Appropriate Rules**

Bedtime for a teenager should be age appropriate, just as it was when your child was a baby. Teens still need about 8-9 hours of sleep. Encourage your teen to stick to a sleep schedule that will meet those needs.

Reward your teen for being trustworthy. Has he or she kept to a 10 p.m. curfew on weekends? Move it to 10:30 p.m. And does a teen always have to go along on family outings? Encourage a reasonable amount of family time together, but be flexible. Don't be insulted when your growing child doesn't always want to be with you. Think back: You probably felt the same way about *your* mom and dad.

### **Will This Ever Be Over?**

As kids progress through the teen years, you'll notice a slowing of the highs and lows of adolescence. And, eventually, they'll become independent, responsible, communicative young adults.

So remember the motto of many parents with teens: We're going through this together, and we'll come out of it — together!

It takes confidence to be a kid. Whether going to a new school or stepping up to bat for the first time, kids face a lot of uncharted territory.

Naturally, parents want to instill a can-do attitude in their kids so that they'll bravely take on new challenges and, over time, believe in themselves.

While each child is a little different, parents can follow some general guidelines to build kids' confidence.



Self-confidence rises out of a sense of competence. In other words, kids develop confidence not because parents tell them they're great, but because of their achievements, big and small. Sure, it's good to hear encouraging words from mom and dad. But words of praise mean more when they refer to a child's specific efforts or new abilities.

When kids achieve something, whether it's brushing their own teeth or riding a bike, they get a sense of themselves as able and capable, and tap into that high-octane fuel of confidence. Building self-confidence can begin very early. When babies learn to turn the pages of a book or toddlers learn to walk, they are getting the idea "I can do it!" With each new skill and milestone, kids can develop increasing confidence.

Parents can help by giving kids lots of opportunities to practice and master their skills, letting kids make mistakes and being there to boost their spirits so they keep trying. Respond with interest and excitement when kids show off a new skill, and reward them with praise when they achieve a goal or make a good effort.

With plentiful opportunities, good instruction, and lots of patience from parents, kids can master basic skills — like tying their shoes and making the bed. Then, when other important challenges present themselves, kids can approach them knowing that they have already been successful in other areas.

### **Stay on the Sidelines**

Of course, supervision is important to ensure that kids stay safe. But to help them really learn a new skill, it's also important not to hover. Give kids the opportunity to try something new, make mistakes, and learn from them.

For instance, if your son wants to learn how to make a peanut butter sandwich, demonstrate, set up the ingredients, and let him give it a try. Will he make a bit of a mess? Almost certainly. But don't swoop in the second some jelly hits the countertop. In fact, avoid any criticism that could discourage him from trying again. If you step in to finish the sandwich, your son will think, "Oh well, I guess I can't make sandwiches."

But if you have patience for the mess and the time it takes to learn, the payoff will be real. Someday soon he'll be able to say, "I'm hungry for lunch, so I'm going to make my own sandwich." You might even reply, "Great, can you make me one, too?" What a clear sign of your faith in his abilities!

### **Offer Encouragement and Praise**

Sometimes, kids give up when frustrations arise. Help by encouraging persistence in the midst of setbacks. By trying again, kids learn that obstacles can be overcome.

Once kids reach a goal, you'll want to praise not only the end result but also their willingness to stick with it. For instance, after your son has mastered making that peanut butter sandwich you might show your confidence by saying, "Next time, want to learn how to crack an egg?"

Sandwich-fixing and egg-cracking might not seem like huge achievements, but they're important steps in the right direction — toward your child's independence.

Throughout childhood, parents have chances to prepare kids to take care of themselves. Sure, it's great to feel needed, but as kids steadily gain confidence and independence, their relationship with you can be even richer. You can be bonded, not just by dependence, but by love and shared pride in all they've achieved.

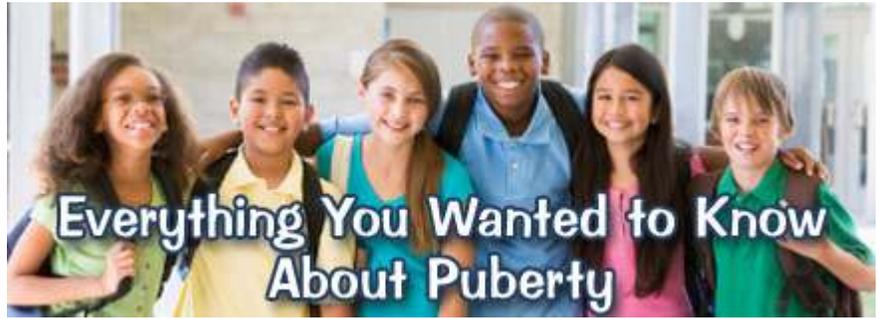
Eventually, your grown-up kids just might say thanks for how prepared they feel for the road ahead — a road they can take with confidence.

## **More Than a Funny Word**

OK, so it's a funny word . . . but what is puberty, anyway?

Puberty is the name for when your body begins to develop and change.

During puberty, your body will grow faster than any other time in your life, except for when you were an infant. Back then, your body was growing rapidly and you were learning new things — you'll be doing these things and much more during puberty. Except this time, you won't have diapers or a rattle and you'll have to dress yourself!



It's good to know about the changes that come along with puberty before they happen, and it's really important to remember that everybody goes through it. No matter where you live, whether you're a guy or a girl, or whether you like hip-hop or country music, you will experience the changes that happen during puberty. No two people are exactly alike. But one thing all adults have in common is they made it through puberty.

## **Time to Change**

When your body reaches a certain age, your brain releases a special hormone that starts the changes of puberty. It's called gonadotropin-releasing hormone, or GnRH for short. When GnRH reaches the pituitary gland (a pea-shaped gland that sits just under the brain), this gland releases into the bloodstream two more puberty hormones: luteinizing hormone (LH for short) and follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH for short). Guys and girls have both of these hormones in their bodies. And depending on whether you're a guy or a girl, these hormones go to work on different parts of the body.

For guys, these hormones travel through the blood and give the testes the signal to begin the production of testosterone and sperm. Testosterone is the hormone that causes most of the changes in a guy's body during puberty. Sperm cells must be produced for men to reproduce. In girls, FSH and LH target the ovaries, which contain eggs that have been there since birth. The hormones stimulate the ovaries to begin producing another hormone called estrogen. Estrogen, along with FSH and LH, causes a girl's body to mature and prepares her for pregnancy.

So that's what's really happening during puberty — it's all these new chemicals moving around inside your body, turning you from a teen into an adult with adult levels of hormones.

Puberty usually starts sometime between age 7 and 13 in girls and 9 and 15 in guys. Some people start puberty a bit earlier or later, though. Each person is a little different, so everyone starts and goes through puberty on his or her body's own schedule. This is one of the reasons why some of your friends might still look like kids, whereas others look more like adults.

**It Doesn't Hurt . . . It's Just a Growth Spurt**

"Spurt" is the word used to describe a short burst of activity, something that happens in a hurry. And a growth spurt is just that: Your body is growing, and it's happening really fast! When you enter puberty, it might seem like your sleeves are always getting shorter and your pants always look like you're ready for a flood — that's because you're experiencing a major growth spurt. It lasts for about 2 to 3 years. When that growth spurt is at its peak, some people grow 4 or more inches in a year.

This growth during puberty will be the last time your body grows taller. After that, you will be at your adult height. But your height isn't the only thing that will be changing.

### **Taking Shape**

As your body grows taller, it will change in other ways, too. You will gain weight, and as your body becomes heavier, you'll start to notice changes in its overall shape. Guys' shoulders will grow wider, and their bodies will become more muscular. Their voices will become deeper. For some guys, the breasts may grow a bit, but for most of them this growth goes away by the end of puberty.

Guys will notice other changes, too, like the lengthening and widening of the penis and the enlargement of the testes. All of these changes mean that their bodies are developing as expected during puberty.

Girls' bodies usually become curvier. They gain weight on their hips, and their breasts develop, starting with just a little swelling under the nipple. Sometimes one breast might develop more quickly than the other, but most of the time they soon even out. With all this growing and developing going on, girls will notice an increase in body fat and occasional soreness under the nipples as the breasts start to enlarge — and that's normal.

Gaining some weight is part of developing into a woman, and it's unhealthy for girls to go on a diet to try to stop this normal weight gain. If you ever have questions or concerns about your weight, talk it over with your doctor.

Usually about 2 to 2½ years after girls' breasts start to develop, they get their first menstrual period. This is one more thing that lets a girl know puberty is progressing and the puberty hormones have been doing their job. Girls have two ovaries, and each ovary holds thousands of eggs. During the menstrual cycle, one of the eggs comes out of an ovary and begins a trip through the fallopian tube, ending up in the uterus (the uterus is also called the womb). Before the egg is released from the ovary, the uterus has been building up its lining with extra blood and tissue. If the egg is fertilized by a sperm cell, it stays in the uterus and grows into a baby, using that extra blood and tissue to keep it healthy and protected as it's developing. Most of the time, though, the egg is only passing through. When the egg doesn't get fertilized, the uterus no longer needs the extra blood and tissue, so it leaves the body through the vagina as a menstrual period. A period usually lasts from 5 to 7 days, and about 2 weeks after the start of the period a new egg is released, which marks the middle of each cycle.

### **Hair, Hair, Everywhere**

Well, maybe not everywhere. But one of the first signs of puberty is hair growing where it didn't grow before. Guys and girls both begin to grow hair under their arms and in their pubic areas (on and around the genitals). It starts out looking light and sparse. Then as you go through puberty, it becomes longer, thicker, heavier, and darker. Eventually, guys also start to grow hair on their faces.

### **About Face**

Another thing that comes with puberty is acne, or pimples. Acne is triggered by puberty hormones. Pimples usually start around the beginning of puberty and can stick around during adolescence (the teen years). You may notice pimples on your face, your upper back, or your upper chest. It helps to keep your skin clean, and your doctor will be able to offer some suggestions for clearing up acne. The good news about acne is that it usually gets better or disappears by the end of adolescence.

## **Putting the P.U. in Puberty**

A lot of teens notice that they have a new smell under their arms and elsewhere on their bodies when they enter puberty, and it's not a pretty one. That smell is body odor, and everyone gets it. As you enter puberty, the puberty hormones affect glands in your skin, and the glands make chemicals that smell bad. These chemicals put the *scent* in adolescent!

So what can you do to feel less stinky? Well, keeping clean is a good way to lessen the smell. You might want to take a shower every day, either in the morning before school, or the night before. Using deodorant (or deodorant with antiperspirant) every day can help keep body odor in check, too.

## **There's More?**

Guys and girls will also notice other body changes as they enter puberty, and they're all normal changes. Girls might see and feel a white, mucous-like discharge from the vagina. This doesn't mean anything is wrong — it is just another sign of your changing body and hormones.

Guys will start to get erections (when the penis fills with blood and becomes hard). Erections happen when guys fantasize and think about sexual things or sometimes for no reason at all. They may experience something called nocturnal emissions (or wet dreams), when the penis becomes erect while a guy is sleeping and he ejaculates. When a guy ejaculates, semen comes out of the penis — semen is a fluid that contains sperm. That's why they're called wet dreams — they happen when you're sleeping and your underwear or the bed might be a little wet when you wake up. Wet dreams become less frequent as guys progress through puberty, and they eventually stop. Guys will also notice that their voices may "crack" and eventually get deeper.

## **Change Can Feel Kind of Strange**

Just as those hormones create changes in the way your body looks on the outside, they also create changes on the inside. While your body is adjusting to all the new hormones, so is your mind. During puberty, you might feel confused or have strong emotions that you've never experienced before. You may feel anxious about how your changing body looks.

You might feel overly sensitive or become easily upset. Some teens lose their tempers more than usual and get angry at their friends or families.

Sometimes it can be difficult to deal with all of these new emotions. Usually people aren't trying to hurt your feelings or upset you on purpose. It might not be your family or friends making you angry — it might be your new "puberty brain" trying to adjust. And while the adjustment can feel difficult in the beginning, it will gradually become easier. It can help to talk to someone and share the burden of how you're feeling — a friend or, even better, a parent, older sibling, or adult who's gone through it all before.

You might have new, confusing feelings about sex — and lot of questions. The adult hormones estrogen and testosterone are signals that your body is giving you new responsibilities, like the ability to create a child. That's why it's important to get all your questions answered.

It's easy to feel embarrassed or anxious when talking about sex, but you need to be sure you have all the right information. Some teens can talk to their parents about sex and get all their questions answered. But if you feel funny talking to your parents about sex, there are many other people to talk to, like your doctor, a school nurse, a teacher, a school counselor, or another adult you feel comfortable talking with.

## **Developing Differently**

People are all a little different from one another, so it makes sense that they don't all develop in the same way. No two people are at exactly the same stage as they go through puberty, and everyone changes at his or her own pace. Some of your friends may be getting curves,

whereas you don't have any yet. Maybe your best friend's voice has changed, and you think you still sound like a kid with a high, squeaky voice. Or maybe you're sick of being the tallest girl in your class or the only boy who has to shave.

But eventually everyone catches up, and the differences between you and your friends will even out. It's also good to keep in mind that there is no right or wrong way to look. That's what makes us human — we all have qualities that make us unique, on the inside and the outside.

**CERTIFIED CHILDREN'S HEALTH COUNSELOR ONLINE COURSE - SESSION 13  
QUESTION & ANSWERS**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY, STATE, ZIP, PC: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

FAX: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

Please be sure to fill out the information above, complete the test and e-mail or mail it back to us at [iridology@netzero.net](mailto:iridology@netzero.net) or P.O. Box 485, Weimar, CA, 95736-0485. We will grade your question & answer session and will let you know if we have any questions or concerns. Please use a separate sheet to do this assignment.

All information will be kept private. If you would like comments and suggestions let us know and we will respond to you.

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1. List changes that happen in both a male and female body during puberty.
  2. What are some of the things you should do to be sure to raise a confident child?