

Understanding Adolescent Problems

Chapter 11



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1. Our business is dealing with youth and novice hunters. In some cases, it has been a long time since you may have had to understand the needs of adolescents today. This chapter is designed to discuss some of the techniques you may use in working with young people and their parents. We have compiled some articles for you to read and some tips about working with these young people.
2. Our program requires an adult to accompany a young hunter on each activity. This requirement is to provide several levels of safety for the youth and the Huntmaster program. First, if there is a problem with the youth, the parent is there to deal with the problem. Our job is not to teach the young person skills that are the responsibility of the parent. We will always pass a problem to the parent until the youth becomes a safety or a discipline problem, then they will be dismissed from the hunt. Secondly, if the parent is accompanying the youth at all times, there is less potential for a misunderstanding if something happens that may be constructed by the youth as inappropriate conduct by the Huntmaster or a volunteer. In all cases, make sure the parents are with the youth hunters at all times.
3. The following are some experts of articles written by various authors in discussion of adolescent behaviors and attitudes. You should become familiar with some of the ideas presented in these articles as they will help you become better prepared in the field.

When is a Child an Adolescent?

Is There a Magic Age that Defines Adolescence?

"I can't believe how my 11-year-old daughter is dressing. I have to send her back to her room in the morning. What is it with these girls trying to grow up so fast? She acts like she's already a teenager, but I see her as a baby." A mother.

Are kids becoming teenagers younger these days? You often hear parents lament that their 10 or 11 year old acts as if they have passed into adolescence. It is not an uncommon experience for children to begin acting out in ways that signal the onset of adolescence at this age. Although "teenager" tends to denote the ages with the suffix "teen," this is an arbitrary designation. The onset of "adolescence" varies from child to child and depends on their level of physical and emotional maturity, the influences of their peer group, and the pressures of the environment. Children who grow up in fast-paced urban environments, for example, often develop a precociousness that belies their pre-teen age.

Adolescence essentially begins when physiologically normal puberty starts. It ends when the person develops an adult identity and behavior. This period of development corresponds roughly to the period

between the ages of 10 and 19 years. Certainly, some adolescents take a few years longer to develop their adult identity and behavior, sometimes into their early to mid twenties.

What are some of the signs that your child has reached "adolescence?" The most obvious signs are physical: for boys it shows up as facial or chest hair, a deepening voice, and signs of increased awareness of their sexuality. For girls, onset of menstruation, breast development, and also changes in the voice (more subtle than with boys) are signs.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recently completed a study that showed the physical changes of puberty occur in girls as young as age 7 or 8 – three years earlier than the trend for puberty over the past 30 years. As a mother of such a girl, you may feel confused at their seeming precociousness. At age 7 or 8 they are physiologically where you were at age 10 or 11. Hormones profoundly affect behavior, so the fact that your "little girl" seems like a teenager is likely influenced by these physical changes. This early puberty trend does not seem to occur in boys at this point in history.

What does this mean for parents? The most important thing to remember is that the 'borders' of adolescence are murky. Not all children acts like teens at age 11, but many do. For girls, this is becoming more and more common due to the younger age when physiological changes occur. Parents may want to consider 'moving up' their talks with children about the changes they will experience (physically and emotionally). This may have to come a good three years earlier than you expected (or learned this information when you were a child).

Recognizing Risk Factors & Warning Signs in Adolescents

Certain conditions and circumstances make an adolescent more at risk for antisocial and/or self-destructive behaviors. Some circumstances are more predictive of problematic behavior if they occur in early or mid-adolescence as opposed to pre-adolescence or childhood.

Because adolescence is a period of significant change for a person (sexual, physical, emotional, and behavioral), strong guidance from parents and teachers can help guide a teen through these stressful and new experiences. Open communication about such topics as emerging sexual feelings and confusion about the changing relationships among peers does much to help a teenager understand that what they are experiencing is normal. Teens should not be pressured into "growing up," but should be allowed to develop their skills in an age-appropriate manner. Often the biggest conflict adolescents have with their parents is that they are expected to act like adults but are treated like children. Parents who have positive communication with their adolescents can negotiate the minefield of budding independence in a way that will protect the teen from "jumping out of the nest" too early yet allow them to experience the power of independent decision making.

Risk Factors for....

Violence

- Victim of physical or sexual abuse
- History of violent acts
- Brain injury
- Exposure to violence in home
- Exposure to violence in community
- Socioeconomic stresses
- Firearms in the home
- Family attitude toward violence
- Antisocial attitudes/beliefs
- Hostility toward authority
- Behavioral: restlessness, difficulty concentrating, risk taking
- Weak social ties
- Gang affiliation
- Intense anger, low frustration level

Alcohol/Drug Use

- Social influences
- Parents/Peers attitude toward use
- Education regarding health issues
- Mood disorder
- Parent with substance problem
- Genetic factors

Suicide

Mood disorder (bipolar especially)
Substance abuse
Family history
Previous threats, attempts
Suicide of a friend

Understanding Adolescent Behavior

A Report from the Surgeon General

Developmentally, puberty is accompanied by major physical and emotional changes that alter a young person's relationships and patterns of interaction with others. The transition into adolescence begins the move toward independence from parents and the need to establish one's own values, personal and sexual identity, and the skills and competencies needed to compete in adult society. Independence requires young people to renegotiate family rules and degree of supervision by parents, a process that can generate conflict and withdrawal from parents. At the same time, social networks expand, and relationships with peers and adults in new social contexts equal or exceed in importance the relationships with parents. The criteria for success and acceptance among peers and adults change.

Adapting to all of these changes in relationships, social contexts, status, and performance criteria can generate great stress, feelings of rejection, and anger at perceived or real failure. Young people may be attracted to violent behavior as a way of asserting their independence of the adult world and its rules, as a way of gaining the attention and respect of peers, as a way of compensating for limited personal competencies, or as a response to restricted opportunities for success at school or in the community. Good relationships with parents during childhood will help in a successful transition to adolescence, but they do not guarantee

Identifying Issues Unique to Teens

Parents often ignore the signs their teen is in trouble, explaining issues away with such beliefs as: "It's a normal phase of adolescence," "He or she will grow out of it." If you feel your teenager exhibits behavior that is impacting his or her academic performance, peer or other social relationships, or physical health, the earlier the intervention the better.

There are a number of standardized tests available to professionals that can help parents identify issues with alcohol or drugs as well as mental health issues:

Personal Experience Screening Questionnaire (PESQ)

Short, inexpensive self-report questionnaire identifies teenagers who should be referred for a complete chemical dependency evaluation.

Adolescent Alcohol Involvement Scale (AAIS)

Fourteen items are designed to identify adolescents with a drinking problem. Assesses level of use and impact by measuring psychological functioning, social relations, and family living.

Adolescent Diagnostic Interview (ADI)

Assesses psychoactive substance abuse in 12- to 18-year-old children. Evaluates psychosocial stressors, school and interpersonal functioning, and cognitive impairment. Screens for specific problems often associated with substance abuse.

Adolescent Drinking Index (ADI)

Measures severity of drinking problems among adolescents by assessing loss of control of drinking, social indicators of drinking problems, psychological indicators, and physical problems related to drinking. Helps professionals identify adolescents who should be referred for further alcohol evaluation or treatment. Also measures self-medicating problem drinking versus aggressive, rebellious drinking behavior.

Alcohol Use Inventory (AUI)

Twenty-four scales designed to measure alcohol use by older adolescents. Best for teens ages 16 and older.

Chemical Dependency Assessment Profile (CDAP)

A self-report questionnaire that evaluates alcohol use, use of illegal and prescription drugs, and abuse of multiple substances. Assesses history and patterns of use as well as personal beliefs and expectations related to drug and alcohol use. Also assesses self-concept and attitude toward treatment. Best for adolescents age 16 or older.

Perceived Benefit of Drinking Scale (PBDS)

Attitude impacts substance use. This test assesses reasons for drinking and drug use, frequency, perceived and actual consequences vs. benefits of use, as well as alcohol use by peer group and family members.

Problem Oriented Screening Instrument for Teenagers (POSIT)

The POSIT is a brief yes/no-answer screening tool that can help professionals identify problems and the potential need for intervention. Assesses substance use/abuse, mental and physical health, family and peer relations, vocation, and special education.

Rutgers Alcohol Problem Index (RAPI)

A 23-item self-administered screening tool to assess adolescent problem drinking. The advantages of this screening tool lie in its ease of administration and its standardization, which make it possible to compare problem drinking scores across groups.

Teen-Addiction Severity Index (T-ASI)

The T-ASI is a semi structured interview that was developed to fill the need for a reliable, valid, and standardized instrument for a periodic evaluation of adolescent substance abuse. Measures such issues as psychoactive substance use, family function, social relationships, and psychiatric status.

Young Adult Alcohol Problems Screening Test (YAAPST)

A 27-item questionnaire to assess lifetime, past-year, and past-year's frequency of negative consequences of alcohol use among college students. The YAAPST assesses both traditional consequences (e.g., hangovers, blackouts, driving while intoxicated) and consequences presumed to occur at higher rates in a college student population (e.g., missing class, damaging property, getting involved in regrettable sexual situations). For older adolescents (college age).

IDENTIFYING ADOLESCENTS AT RISK FOR SUICIDE

If your teen has expressed suicidal intentions, one important thing is to take away the car keys, especially if your teen has been using alcohol or drugs.

If you are not the parent, notify them immediately that you feel the teen is at risk for suicide. This is particularly important if the child has made a previous attempt or has developed a specific plan, or if the teen has recently experienced a trauma (death, school failure, moving to a new town).

Firearms should be immediately removed from the home. If you know other homes your teen frequents have guns (even locked guns), warn the homeowners of the risk.

Behavioral and Physical Signs of Drug and Alcohol Use

If you notice a change in your teen's normal activities or behavior, and you cannot explain it as due to the typical issues of adolescence, it may be a sign of alcohol or substance abuse. Pay attention to changes in your child's appearance, friends and peer group, way of expressing him or herself, school performance, extracurricular activities or hobbies, and overall behavior. If your teen now refuses to do chores, misses curfew regularly, creates a chaotic and hostile environment in the home, and frequently appears to be depressed, agitated, or "sleepy," you should investigate further, maintain clear channels of communication, and set clear boundaries and rules.

For more information on Adolescent Substance Abuse, visit **ASK**, the Adolescent Substance Abuse Knowledge Base site.

Specific Signs to Note:

- Change in sleeping patterns
- Bloodshot eyes
- Slurred or agitated speech
- Changes in grades
- Complaints from teachers
- Missing school
- Furtive or secretive behavior
- Locked doors
- Change in friends or peer group
- Change in clothing, appearance
- Unusual smell on clothing or breath
- Emotional instability
- Hyperactive or hyper-aggressive
- Depressed

Recognizing When Use Has Become Abuse

Unfortunately in many cases a teenager will use drugs and alcohol for quite some time before parents notice the signs of a problem. Often by the time a parent sees the obvious signs, the child has a problem that goes beyond occasional use of these substances. The child may now have developed an abusive pattern of use and may be addicted to drugs or alcohol. The best solution for such teens is to get them out of the immediate environment and away from the peer influences that are enabling their abuse of drugs or alcohol. Drug or alcohol rehab may be necessary to give the child a time period in which to get on his or her feet and begin a program of recovery from addiction.

To learn more about alcohol and drug use, treatment, rehabs, and other residential treatment programs, please visit **ASK, the Adolescent Substance Abuse Knowledge Base**.

Specific Signs of Addiction:

- Hidden stashes of alcohol
- Alcohol missing from your supply
- Hangovers
- Sick more often
- Money missing
- Valuables missing
- Child "disappears" for long periods
- Running Away
- Makes phone calls to beepers
- Secretive phone calls
- Unusual containers, wrappers
- Reports of intoxication at school
- Desperation/withdrawal
- Other drug-seeking behavior
- Prescription medicine missing

The Seven Developmental Needs of Young Adolescents

A checklist for Youth Programs

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: Because they are growing faster than any other time in their lives except infancy, young adolescents need to move. Not being active is often interpreted as boredom. Giving them active things to do and excusing their inability to sit still are ways of recognizing the need for physical activity.

COMPETENCE AND ACHIEVEMENT: Young adolescents have a strong desire to do things well and be recognized for their achievements. They are very self-conscious, so rewards mean everything and embarrassment and failure are devastating. Making success too difficult is a problem. Providing opportunities for achievable success, especially situations in which everyone can succeed in his or her own way can help meet this need.

SELF-DEFINITION: Young adolescents spend a good deal of time trying to figure out who they are. They need opportunities to explore being an adolescent instead of a child, belonging to the gender, race and ethnic group and what their new physical and mental abilities will let them do. Providing for the exploration of a variety of ideas, skills, crafts and games will facilitate growth in this area and help young people avoid dangerous risk-taking as a means of self-definition.

CREATIVE EXPRESION: During adolescence, young people begin to identify what makes the unique as what an individual creates, whether it is written, grown, painted or performed. Although all young people are not artistic or musical, all young people can create something unique and special.

POSITIVE SOCIAL INTERACTION WITH PEERS AND ADULTS.: Most adults recognize and accept the fact that young people need to have positive interaction and friendships with other young people but they are skeptical about young people's desire to be with adults. But yo0ung people themselves admit their parents, friends and other adults remain of primary importance in setting values and giving affection. The best youth programs offer accessible and responsible adults with whom the young people can interact and they provide interaction with peers that support and build social skills.

STUCTURE AND CLEAR LIMITS: Young people want to know what the expectations are fir their behavior and what they may or may not do. If the structure is too loose, they will not know what to expect and will react out of a

sense of insecurity. If the rules are clear, they may and probably will test them, but they want and expect consistent reinforcement of those rules.

MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION: Good youth programs are designed with young people, not for them. As they near adulthood, the experience of taking responsibility for programs in which they participate helps to develop adult skills and increases commitment to the programs. Although their commitments are likely to be short-term, allowing them the chance to participate meaningfully in the program will help them become a part of the activity and feel a strong desire for it to succeed.

4. Now that we have looked at an overview of some of the challenges for young people today, let's focus on some things that you may see in a youth hunting activity and discuss how you can handle the situation.
 - a. **Working with a novice shooter:** Often times you will be working with a young person in correcting poor shooting stance or control of the firearm. Our NSSA Level 1 instructor course can help you with many of the techniques used to correct shooting problems. In many cases you will be required to touch the shooter to correct a stance problem.

The following article written by James V. Peter Jr. describes some techniques you can use to help the young shooter.

A major element of shooting is stance. When working with shooters, particularly beginners, instructors frequently must use their hands to position them or to correct their form. Even though close contact with the shooter is essential for effective instruction, the instructor must be careful to avoid any action that could appear improper or cause the student anxiety.

A few simple actions can ensure a working relationship between instructor and student without any question for anxiety or impropriety. Respectful, non-threatening treatment of shooters begins with demonstration. Use a junior leader or an assistant to demonstrate how instructors will handle shooters to correct their posture or position. By telling the shooter what you are about to do, you can further reduce their anxiety. Tell the shooter you are going to push his or her torso forward, raise an elbow, reposition a hand or turn his or her hips. The posture of our hands when contacting a student can also ease their anxiety. Except in an unsafe situation where immediate and decisive action is required, it is seldom necessary to grab a student or a firearm. When your hands are held relatively rigid with the fingers straight and the thumbs resting on top of the hands, they are much less threatened. Pressure from the palms of the flattened hand can accomplish the most positioning and control needs.

- b. **Dealing with remorse after a harvest:** In our business, many of the young hunters have never harvested an animal before. Sometimes, the act of taking the life of a game animal may affect a young hunter emotionally and as a guide/Huntmaster you must be ready to help them through the emotional roller coaster of such an event. The following ideas may help you through your first encounter with “hunter remorse”. Use it as a guide and develop a technique that works for you.

Taking a life is an emotional event, even to the most seasoned hunter. We all deal with the reality of the harvest in different ways but there are some general techniques that can help the new hunter through the realization that they have just taken a life. First, the young hunter should make the decision about taking or not taking the shot. There should be no pressure from you or the parent about taking the shot. If the young hunter decides not to fire, accept the decision and move on. They may tell you that the shot is not within their comfort zone or they may all of a sudden be unable to see the target clearly, when it is not obscured by brush or cover. The young hunter may pause or simply ask to pass on the shot. They are in charge at this point. If they pass on the shot, talk to them about the situation and attempt to determine why they decided not to take the shot. Continue to be encouraging and never attempt to force them into a situation they do not want to pursue.

After the shot has been taken, the reality of taking a life may set in for the young hunter. In upland bird and waterfowl hunting, the young hunter may shoot and harvest the bird in a rapid succession of events and may not stop to consider the shot until after the bird is recovered. Watch the young hunter for signs of distress or remorse. If they begin to show signs of uncomfortable ness, distress or even an outburst of emotion, help them through this period by removing the bird from sight for a few minutes and talking to them about the events of the hunt, the need for hunting in wildlife management and the humane nature of their action by making a clean shot. Take time to allow the event to soak in and let them set the pace of the discussion. If they ask to see the bird, great, talk about the plumage, the beauty of the bird and allow them to touch it if they wish. Do not rush the activity in any way. Big game animals may elicit an even greater reaction by the young hunter. They have taken time to see the animal, determine the heart/lung area and have focused on the animal for quite some time before taking the shot. As I said earlier, the decision is the hunter’s. If the hunter does take a shot and harvests the animal, take your time after the shot to assess the young hunter. Again, watch for the

signs of distress or remorse. When approaching the downed animal, take your time. As you walk to the animal, talk about the quality of the hunter's shot, the clean, quick harvest and the beauty of the animal. When you arrive at the animal, allow the hunter time to look at the animal, talk to them about the beauty, the humane nature of the harvest and the need for hunting in wildlife management. Allow the hunter to take each step of the harvest at their own pace.

Finally, we encourage all hunters to properly field dress their own animals. You need to be ready to assist in every aspect of properly dressing the animal. Take time to explain the process and help. You should become familiar with the major organs of a big game animal and as the field dressing progresses, show the hunter the organs and describe them to the hunter. This is a great biology lesson and the young hunters typically will ask many *questions about the* process. Above all...Take your time and work through any signs of distress from the hunter.

If a young hunter is overcome with emotion and you cannot work through the emotions of the harvest. Remove them from the area completely and return to the animal later. Involve the parent or sponsor in the discussion and take your time. In many cases, the young hunter will regain control of their emotions and desire to return to the animal to field dress it.

- c. **Disciplinary problems:** On a rare occasion, you may have one youth hunter or even a parent who presents a disciplinary problem on the hunt. The problem may be a minor one such as failure to do their share of the camp work or a major issue that can create a safety problem for the entire group. There is no text book answer for this but the bottom line is the Huntmaster is in charge. Attempt to resolve the problem as quickly as possible but if your actions are not successful, ask the parent and the youth hunter to leave the hunt. If working in a remote area, escort the hunter and sponsor back to the nearest major highway or town and insure they are given detailed directions to return home. Report such an incident to the Hunter Outreach Coordinator as soon as the hunt is completed.