

RELATIONSHIP ISSUES IN ADOLESCENTS

During early and middle adolescent years, there is usually more frequent conflict between teens and their parents. As youths' peer relationships become more central to their lives, and the quality of peer relationships changes during adolescence, there is less time available to spend with their family members.

However, these changes and the lack of time is not the only reason for this shift away from family. The qualitative changes are due to greater cognitive and emotional maturity. As adolescents and teens become more emotionally mature their relationships with their peers become more trusting, and more emotionally intimate. Cognitive development enables adolescents to better understand and anticipate the wants, needs, and feelings of their peers. This increased mental and emotional maturity means that adolescents are now better able to offer genuine emotional support and comfort to each other, as well as sensible advice. Thus, the family is no longer the only source of social support.

During early and middle adolescent years, teens are trying to assert their individuality and are exercising their independence so there is usually more frequent conflict between teens and their parents. Adolescents may rebel against their parents' rules and values as part of their identity development process. Sometimes they openly defy these rules and values, while at other times they do so in private. They may be reluctant to discuss certain topics with their caregivers when they are afraid that such a discussion will get them into trouble. Thus causing more destructive behavior and potential future damage.

Another reason young teens may refrain from discussing certain things with their parents is to prove to themselves, and to their parents, that they can handle life's tough situations on their own. But instead, when teens turn to their friends for help, they are

consulting with each other from a position of equal power and status, which is quite different from and will yield different results from consulting adults.

TEEN FRIENDSHIPS & RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS

It is not clear if modern day teens are more likely to belong to mixed-gender groups than they were in the past. Some professionals who work with teens say that it is more common, perhaps due to changing attitudes. However, teenage boys still spend most of their time with other boys, and teenage girls spend most of their time with other girls. Due to an influx of hormonal changes these dynamics are drastically changed when dating situations and experiences are introduced. Causing a plethora of all new challenges.

The negative side of teen friendships hasn't changed much, either in modern days. Teenage girls tend to be what sociologists call "relationally aggressive." If they're angry with others, they're more likely to hurt them by spreading rumours, verbally assaulting them, or persuading others to ignore them. Teenage boys are more likely to simply cut off or withdraw from a relationship or perhaps become physically aggressive.

CONCERNS WITH YOUR TEEN'S FRIENDS

The most effective way to head off problems with friends by keeping an eye on what your teen is doing and knowing who their friends are. Perhaps try to make it a house rule that your teen calls you if he's going to be home late or if he's heading off somewhere else with his friends. Make sure their friends feel welcome in your home, so you'll have a chance to know them.

For some adolescents, the problem with friends – is that they have none. When your kids were younger, you may have helped by creating opportunities for them to meet other children. But that tactic doesn't work with adolescents. They're more likely to resent having their parents getting involved — it might further damage their image in the eyes of other teens. Suggest activities in which they might meet other teens with similar interests, but let them decide if they want to join. Don't be discouraged if your teen seems to reject your reassurances. Your influence is much stronger than it may appear from your teen's reactions to your suggestions.

BRIDGING PROGRAMS / MANAGING CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

The emotional and social changes adolescents experience can challenge young people as they try to cope with new issues and life experiences. Friends provide emotional support, but this is a time when friendship patterns are changing. Parents are needed for emotional, material, and information support, but, at the same time, they need to allow young people sufficient room to develop their own sense of identity. Coping with relationship issues can be facilitated through communication, human relationship training, and problem solving, which blurs most of the traditional distinction between career and personal counseling.

There are such things as “Bridging Programs”. Many young people lack “hands-on” experience as they attempt to enter the world of work. Many also are unfamiliar with, and fearful of, moving into post-secondary education. To address this concern, there are counselors available, outdoor and wilderness therapy programs, work experience and co-op education programs to help young people acquire the necessary experiences. Post-secondary education entry programs can also play an important role in easing transition difficulties.

Usually a parents’ best approach to relationship issues is to guide their teen or adolescent to develop their own solution, even if the solution they select is not the most optimal alternative. Such an approach enables teens to practice independent decision-making while still benefiting from the wisdom parents can offer. When parents remain sensitive to these issues, it increases the likelihood that teens will discuss important problems with their parents.