

Dr. Kathy McCoy



Q & A: Teen Transitions

Q. What question have teenagers asked you the most over the years?

A. “Am I normal?” They worry about this in regard to various aspects of their changing bodies or lives. “Is my body normal?” “Are my feelings normal?” Teens have a great need to know that there is some order and normalcy to the chaos that is puberty.

Q. What are some of the unique challenges that teens face today?

A. The changing world of technology has created great changes and challenges for teens. On the one hand, they can become instant YouTube celebrities or their selfies can go viral. On the other hand, cyber-bullying can be even more devastating than school hallway snubbing or name-calling, and sexting can have consequences well beyond immediate embarrassment. Also, teens today face a future that is more uncertain than in the past: college costs are skyrocketing and school loans are life-limiting; the job market is challenging; and the cost of living continues to rise. All of this makes the transition to independence tougher for young adults today.

Q. How can parents best help teens and young adults as they struggle with these tough transitions?

A. By being there. By listening rather than rushing to judgment or to rescue. By encouraging and supporting their interests and passions from an early to help carry them through those tempestuous years of change and self-doubt. The legendary advice-columnist, Ann Landers, said it best: “It’s not what you do for your children, but what you have taught them to do for themselves that will make them successful human beings.”

Q. How can parents discourage teenage sex?

A. They can’t. But they can give their teenage children as much information as possible so they can make informed decisions. It’s important that teens know about birth control, for example. Arming them with information is not the same as giving them permission to have sex. They make their own decisions so it’s best that they learn as much as possible about facts and consequences in advance. Making your own thoughts and values clear is helpful too, since many teens today—whether they admit it or not—truly care about what their parents think and feel. It’s also important for teens to know that no problem will be made worse by telling their parents about it.

Q. How can I get my teenager to respect me?

A. By showing respect to him or her and picking your battles wisely. Give each other room to learn and grow, to make mistakes, and to have opinions—even when you disagree.

Dr. Kathy McCoy is an award-winning author, a journalist and a blogger as well as a psychotherapist specializing in family dynamics, teenagers, and Baby Boomers. Her book, *The Teenage Body Book*, is available on Amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com.