



Why does my teen act the way they do?

A teen's behaviour may be difficult to understand at times as their brain is still developing



Raising a teenager can often feel like a maze of frustration, mood swings, and challenging behaviours. While these typical teenage traits can be a handful, it can be helpful to remind ourselves that our teens are going through a challenging period of growth and self-discovery, one that we have all gone through ourselves.

Brain development

It's important to remember that the reason your teen's behaviour may feel so difficult to understand at times is because their brains are still developing. During adolescence, the parts of the brain responsible for decision-making, impulse control, and emotional regulation, are still maturing. This can lead to impulsive actions, mood swings, and difficulty managing emotions.

Finding identity

Teenagers are in the process of figuring out who they are and where they fit in the world. This journey often

involves questioning authority, exploring new identities, and challenging social norms. As they seek more independence and autonomy, it's likely that their opinions will differ from your own. These new thoughts and opinions may not be fully formed and could change time and time again as they discover more about themselves. It's helpful to view this phase as a work in progress and expect that there will be some bumps in the road.

Influence of peers

Friends become an increasingly significant part of a teenager's life. They often value the opinions of their peers more than those of the adults around them. Frustration can emerge when your viewpoints clash with those of friends or when they feel pressure to be more like their peers. The classic argument that "everyone else is doing it" is bound to pop up occasionally. When these situations arise, try to address your teen calmly and explain that you are responsible for them, not their friends, and rules are there for a reason. If they've reached an age where some rules may no longer align with their level of maturity and there's room for negotiation, let them know that you want to hear them out and come to a decision together. Remember, helping your teen to reach independence and autonomy as a young adult is often done in small stages.

Emotional rollercoaster

Hormonal changes intensify emotions, leading to extreme highs and lows. Seemingly small issues can seem like monumental problems in the eyes of your teen. You may find yourself on the receiving end of intense emotions that are difficult to manage. When responding to these emotions, it's helpful to remember that there are hormonal changes at play and to not take your teen's behaviour personally.

5 Tips for bridging the teenage gap

As teenagers strive for independence, they may become less open to sharing their thoughts and feelings with you. This communication gap can lead to misunderstandings, frustration, and an inability to address concerns effectively. However, there are ways you can help to bridge this gap.

1. Lead with empathy

While it's natural to want to solve your teenager's problems, sometimes they just need someone to listen without judgment. Let them express their feelings and thoughts, even if they seem irrational. This validation can help them feel understood and supported and allows them to vent.

2. Choose your battles

Not every issue needs to be a confrontation. Think about what matters most and be willing to let go of minor disagreements to avoid increasing tension. Pick an appropriate time to have conversations – perhaps while walking or in the car where it feels less confrontational for your teen.

3. Speak openly

Foster an environment where your teenager feels comfortable discussing their concerns with you. Avoid jumping to conclusions or getting defensive when they express their feelings, even if you disagree.

4. Offer guidance

While teens seek independence, they still value your guidance. Instead of giving an order, you could try to involve your teen in a discussion about potential solutions.

5. Take a breath

Remember that this phase is temporary. As your teen's brain continues to develop and they gain more life experience, many of the things that frustrate you now may simply go away.

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