



Teen Behavior in the Library

Beginners Bootcamp

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You have to leave the ground to learn to fly . . .

What are the
characteristics of a
typical teen?

“Our youth now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority, they show disrespect for their elders and love chatter in place of exercise; they no longer rise when elders enter the room; they contradict their parents, chatter before company; gobble up the food and tyrannize their teachers.”

Socrates

5th Century

What is adolescence?

- It is the time between childhood and adulthood.
- It begins with puberty.
 - Puberty sets in much earlier in industrialized countries in recent years.

- Adolescence ends when a teen takes on the role of an adult.
 - This is becoming increasingly hard to define.
 - It is being pushed back by economic changes.

4 Major Changes

1. Rapid physical changes.
2. Changes in both the intensity and volatility of emotions
3. The shift of influence from parents to peers.
4. The search for identity- the need to answer the questions 'Who am I?' and 'Who do I want to be?'.

Physical and Emotional Changes- Hormones

Hormones are chemical messages that help regulate body function and direct physical responses.

The brain produces certain hormones to notify the body when it is time for the physical growth into adulthood.

The Big Two

In adolescents the body is awash with any number of hormones but there are 2 major triggers of changes.

For Boys- Testosterone is king.

For Girls- Estrogen rules.

Testosterone

- Is responsible for male physical growth.
- Affects the amygdale- the fight or flight center of the brain- the seat of fear and aggression.
- The swell of this hormone can cause surges of anger, aggression, sexual interest, dominance, and territoriality.

Estrogen (and Proestrogen)

- Responsible for physical changes and growth.
- Affects the hippocampus, the memory center of the brain which may give girls an advantage in scholarly pursuits.
- Fluctuations of these hormones can lead to depression.

Brain Development in Adolescence

As the brain develops, certain parts of it experience an explosion of growth of neural connections. This is known as Blossoming.

Pruning

Not all the connections that have been produced will remain, however. Connections that are not used eventually shrink and disappear. A process called pruning.

USE IT or LOSE IT!

Prefrontal Cortex

The brain's conscience- it is responsible for planning ahead, considering consequences and managing emotional control.

The Prefrontal Cortex (or PFC) is located just behind the bone of the forehead.

Prefrontal Cortex

Blossoming in the Prefrontal Cortex begins around 11 or 12 and pruning continues through adolescence.

This means that through the adolescent years, teens are learning to use their Prefrontal Cortex.

Prefrontal Cortex

Because the Prefrontal Cortex's wiring is still incomplete **adolescents can't always distinguish between a good decision and a bad one.**

Prefrontal Cortex

Because the PFC is still developing, **teens do NOT have the same level of impulse control as adults.**

Prefrontal Cortex

One of the most important things teens learn during these years is how to control impulses and use reason to handle various situations. They must use the connections that have blossomed in the Prefrontal Cortex or *risk losing them*.

Prefrontal Cortex

As the PFC develops, teens often rely on the amygdale for evaluation- a 'gut reaction', instead of using the PFC to deal with a situation using reason.

Because of this, teens can easily misinterpret a situation (including the approach and motivations of adults).

Individuation

During adolescence, teens begin to shape their identity according to their beliefs and goals for the future.

This process often looks like simple rebellion to parents and other adults.

Individuation

Challenging figures of authority is 'one of the quintessential activities of adolescence'.

Individuation

Part of Individuation is formulating your own opinions, separate of your parents or family on a variety of topics.

Teens (especially young teens) need positive interaction with adults other than their parents to test out these new opinions.

Characteristics of teens

1. Need to find out who they are.
2. Individuation begins.
3. Go through huge physical and emotional changes.
4. Peer relationships take precedence over family ones.
5. Explore and exercise personal power and autonomy.
6. Have a great need for privacy.
7. Parents become an embarrassment.
8. See themselves as omnipotent and all knowing.

Deal With It

Even though poor impulse control and decision making skills are not technically the fault of teens that does NOT mean inappropriate behavior should be allowed to pass.

Now, is the time for teens to learn to manage their impulses and emotions.

We can help encourage them to Use It rather than Lose It.

Guidelines for Dealing With It

Teens need to know what is expected.

-This means *you* should know what *your* library considers acceptable and not acceptable. Be able to communicate policies and the reasoning behind them clearly.

Guidelines for Dealing With It

What is the primary purpose of library policy?

- To ensure that *everyone* has a pleasant, productive and safe experience in the library.



Guidelines for Dealing With It

Teens need to know what is NOT acceptable and the consequences for inappropriate behavior.

- This means *you* need to know what process to use when behavior is unacceptable.
- We set consequences. We do not punish. Punishment is about power and we do not engage in power struggles.
- Consequences should be appropriate to the infraction.

Confrontation (Ohhh, scary!)

1. Is this really a problem?

- Behavior is a problem when it disturbs other patrons or violates library policy or is obviously dangerous or destructive.

- Take your emotional temperature.

Feeling a little irritable today? Would you confront an adult patron for the same behavior?

Steps of Confrontation

2. Do NOT get angry.

- Anger compromises your judgment.
- It make teens resentful, defensive, and inclined to argue.
- Get help if you need it.

Steps of Confrontation

3. Take a minute and visualize how you want this interaction to go.

- What are you going to say?
- What are you going to do according to their reactions?
- Picture yourself as calm and firm.

Steps of Confrontation

4. Greet the teen. Then inform them of the specific issue and the consequence if they do not modify their behavior. Example “Hi. Your language is pretty rough. Please, use language that’s appropriate for public or I will have to ask you to leave the library for the day.”

Steps of Confrontation

- Don't stand within arms reach. Do not touch them.
- You can also offer a helpful suggestion. For example, if they are listening to music on the computer and it's too loud, have headphones they can use. Offer to get a pair for them.

Steps of Confrontation

- Be as specific as possible and deal with one issue at a time. The more succinct you are, the less room there is for argument.
- Don't use generalizations. Avoid language like, "You always. . ." or "Everyday, I have to. . ."

Steps of Confrontation

-Do not use name calling, put downs, sarcasm. Don't make it personal.

Humiliation is a power move, a 'tactic to seize the upper hand'.



Steps of Confrontation

-Do not communicate consequences as threats. Ultimatums are a sign of desperation.

That approach is more likely to arouse defiance and counterattacks than cooperation.



Steps of Confrontation

This is not about who's more '*right*'.

It's about managing the conflict well.



Steps of Confrontation

- Make sure you have their attention.
- If you don't know them, introduce yourself and ask for their name.
- Tell them what you want them to do. Not what you don't want them to do.

Watch the rate of your speech- speaking slowly guarantees that you are breathing. This will help keep you calm

Steps of Confrontation

- Make sure you have their attention.
- If you don't know them, introduce yourself and ask for their name.
- Tell them what you want them to do. Not what you don't want them to do. Ex. (Sitting on each others laps) "Brittany, please get your own chair to sit in when you are talking to Connor."

Steps of Confrontation

Don't be surprised when adolescents become surly even when you are acting completely reasonably.

A little attitude is to be expected.

“Responding to negativity reinforces the conflict and keeps everyone engaged.”

But you do not have to take verbal abuse either.

Steps of Confrontation

They may try to argue. Do not get into power struggles. The rules are the rules. The consequences are the consequences. They choose what happens next.

Don't get sidetracked by extraneous info like other participants, history, extenuating circumstances.

A decorative graphic of stylized clouds in the bottom-left corner, with a grey base and white clouds outlined in teal.

Steps of Confrontation

Some kids have learned that provoking an emotional reaction can distract adults from the primary issue- the behavior that the adult wants to change.

If you feel your blood pressure start to rise, take a deep breath and **CALM DOWN**. If this doesn't fix it, extradiate yourself from the situation. Ask for help.

Steps of Confrontation

Most times this is enough. Not always.

If the behavior continues-

5. Enforce the consequences you spoke of earlier. Example, “Jamie, you have decided to continue swearing. Leave the library for the rest of the day and don’t come back until tomorrow.”

-Again, don’t get angry. Don’t argue.

Steps of Confrontation

On very, very rare occasions, situations can escalate.

You do not ever have to take verbal abuse, physical threats or violence.

If a teen ever threatens you, throws something at you, swears at you they should leave and never come back. Do not hesitate to call the police if you, a patron, or another staff member is threatened.

Steps of Confrontation

Put it all together.

Example (for kid you don't know)-

“Hi. I'm Tracy. I work in the kids room. What's your name?”

“David.”

“David, your music is really loud. Please, turn it down or use headphones. We have some at the desk you can use. Can I get you a pair?”

Wait 30 seconds for compliance.

If they comply- “Thanks a lot. Let me know if you need anything, okay?”

If they don't comply- “If you don't turn it down, I'll have to cancel you're computer access for the day.”

Steps of Confrontations

#1, Most Important, Do Not Forget-

- Consistency and follow through are vital!
We must unwaveringly enforce rules and consequences.
- Don't ignore inappropriate behavior
because you are afraid of a confrontation

Steps of Confrontation

Let's practice!

A Helpful Hint

Know your teens!

As teens begin to formulate their own beliefs and opinions, they will seek out affirmation for adults other than their parents.

Teens (especially young teens) are often hungry for positive interaction with adults.



Helpful Hints

Space can have a very real impact on teen behavior.

- Do they have their own space? Separate from children and adults?
- Is that space easy for staff to monitor visually?
- Does it allow teens to be teens? For example, does it have comfortable seating, access to technology, and some soundproofing?

Group Dynamics

Teen events or meetings-

It is important to create a space that is safe and comfortable.

Group Dynamics

Icebreakers!

- These are good for all events not just regular meetings.
- Can be as simple as free form group projects, games or other activities.
- Some examples include the M&M game, Name that tune, Shoe Biz, Who am I? or Truth, truth, lie.

Group Dynamics

Establish Group Guidelines-

- Do this *with* the kids. Not just ‘What are the goals of this group?’ but ‘What kind of group do you want to have?’ ‘What kind of behavior do you feel is unacceptable?’
- Write them down. Post them if you feel they need a reminder. You can even ask them to sign them.

Group Dynamics

Establish Group Guidelines-

-As adults it's important for us to model the behaviors we want to see in the kids. You obey the rules, too!

Hint- Do not participate in gossip with the kids or in front of them.

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