

### Growth and Development

- Puberty and the teenage growth spurt can begin as early as 9 or 10 (for girls) and as late as 13 or 14. Girls usually start their sexual development about a year or two earlier than boys.
- Along with the physical changes boys and girls experience changes in their emotions, their likes and dislikes and their sense of who they are. They begin to look to their peers for support and affirmation and often think their parents are an embarrassment. They begin to want more freedom from parental rules and restrictions. This can create challenges and conflicts for parents and teens alike. It is important to gradually loosen parental controls but equally important to expect responsible and trustworthy behavior in return. Despite these conflicts and tensions, adolescents still look to their parents as role models and for guidance. Be open to discussion and compromise as your child evolves from childhood, through adolescence and into adulthood.
- School achievement is increasingly important for adolescents. Help your teen deal with the inevitable distractions of social life and maintain focus on learning and academic achievement.

### Behavior

- Boys often identify with sports teams and girls with popular-culture icons such as singers or actresses. Although both parents, as always, play an important role in the life of their children, the parent of the same gender as the child plays a particularly important role at this time. Despite the attention given to popular culture heroes, role-modeling by parents is very important.
- Periods of high and low emotions are common in teenagers. Consult your doctor if periods of unhappiness or anger persist for weeks or months.

### Social Skills

- Adolescents should be taught to respect the feelings of their peers. They should be responsible for their actions and expect responsible behavior from their friends and peers. It is important to discuss with your child how to make good choices in the company of friends.
- Projecting a positive self-esteem is very important at this age. Your child should not always be putting himself down. Ask your health care provider for advice if your child consistently has a poor self-esteem.
- Kids want to dress the way their friends dress. This is important for your child and, within reason, you should respect your child's choices. Similarly, your child will want to speak with words that may be unique to their peers, age group, or pop culture. Again, within reason, this choice is to be respected.

### Reading

- Reading is a very important skill. Encourage reading for pleasure and discuss with them what they read.

### Television and Electronic Games

- Limit television time to no more than two hours per day. Encourage participation in family games and other activities. Monitor the television programs. Be sure to watch some of the programs with your child and discuss the show later.
- Set limits on the amount of time spent with electronic games and monitor internet usage. It is best to have computers in public areas of the house rather than in bedrooms.

### Sexuality

- Issues about sexuality should be something that you have already begun discussing and that you and your child both feel you can talk about openly. Rules about dating are important. Adolescents should be aware of the possibility of date rape and avoid situations that may put them at risk.
- Sexual activity is very prevalent among teenagers. They need to know the risks and responsibilities associated with being sexually active and that abstinence is the only guaranteed way to avoid pregnancy and infections. They should also be aware of ways to protect themselves if they choose to have sex.

### Safety Tips

- Accidents are the number one cause of deaths in adolescents. They like to take risks at this age but are not well prepared to judge the degree of those risks.

### Car Safety

- All passengers should always wear safety belts.
- Adolescent drivers have the highest rate of accidents and fatalities. Limits on night driving and the number of passengers in cars driven by adolescents are good and reasonable precautions. Parents need to model safe driving practices.
- The use of cell phones while driving is illegal in Virginia.

### Sports and Bicycle Safety

- Use of helmets and other protective equipment is very important in bicycling, skateboarding, snowboarding and other sports.

### Nutrition

- Breakfast is an important meal. It makes weight control more effective and improves thinking and learning ability in school. It should be high in protein and fiber and low in sugar, whole grain cereals, low fat milk, eggs are good choices. Pop tarts, pancakes, and waffles have little fiber or protein and are high in sugar which can cause a drop in blood sugar in mid-morning.
- Limit sodas and high fat foods such as French fries, chips hamburgers and pizza.
- Avoid crash diets for weight control.

### Dental Care

- Brushing teeth regularly after meals continues to be important as are regular dental checkups.

### Medical Care

- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that adolescents have a routine checkup every year. Be sure to bring your child's immunization record to every annual visit.