

OCTOBER 2015

Developing Emotional Awareness in Adolescents

Adolescence is an exciting time in your child's development. Physical changes, intellectual growth, social adjustments and emotional awareness are all part of this intense and exhausting developmental stage. Most parents are educated about the physical changes that happen during adolescence. Intellectual growth and social adjustments are the focus of endless books and parenting articles. But we often overlook the importance of our child's developing emotional awareness. We attribute the changes in our child's emotions to "moodiness" or "teenage angst". We believe that our only option is to grit our teeth and white-knuckle our way through until this phase passes. The truth is, our response and guidance in the development of our children's emotional awareness is critical to helping them establish the confidence and self-esteem that will allow them to become positive, productive individuals who interact appropriately and compassionately with others.

During adolescence, our children begin to master the emotional skills that allow them to manage stress and become able to effectively relate to others. These skills are often referred to as "emotional intelligence". Emotional intelligence involves self-awareness and relationships skills, including the ability to get along well with other people and to make friends. Development of these skills will allow our children to succeed in both their personal and professional lives now and into adulthood.

What can we do to help our children shape their emotional intelligence? Read this month's Parenting Power Tips to learn about the skills that they will assist your child as he/she begins to master their emotional awareness.



Recognizing and managing emotions- In order to label feelings accurately, it's important to recognize them. It's not enough to say they feel "good" or "bad". Being able to specify what they are feeling allows adolescents to discover options to resolve problems. For example, if they are able to recognize that they feel "anxious" about an upcoming test, they have identified the source of their feelings. They can then be proactive and begin to find constructive solutions. Without this skill, feelings become uncomfortable and undefined which can lead to the adolescent withdrawing and turning to unhealthy ways to cope with their confused emotions.

Developing empathy- Teaching youth to recognize their own emotions does not guarantee that they will recognize those emotions in others. Teaching empathy is important to developing understanding, compassionate relationships.

Learning to resolve conflict constructively- We all have different needs. Conflict is inevitable and stressful. We can teach our children conflict resolution by helping them to identify their own position in a conflict, recognize their feelings and the feelings of the other individual. They can then learn to come to a mutually acceptable resolution to their conflict. Individuals who are able to develop this skill become more confident and self-assured.

Developing a cooperative spirit- Adolescents are naturally competitive. However, in order to succeed in most areas of life, it is important to work cooperatively with others and learn to be part of a team. Emotional awareness allows an individual to express their needs and recognize the needs of others.

Remember:

- ⇒ Emotions come and go. Most of us feel many different emotions throughout the day. Some last a few seconds, others last longer.
- ⇒ Emotions can be mild, intense, or anywhere in between. The intensity of an emotion can depend on the situation and on the person.
- ⇒ There are no good or bad emotions, but there are good and bad ways of expressing (or acting on) emotions. Learning how to express emotions in an acceptable way is based on your emotional awareness.
- ⇒ Our children learn a lot about life by watching how we live ours. Modeling healthy responses to emotions and stress helps our children learn to have healthy responses.
- ⇒ **Use this month's [PowerTalk for Families](#) for practical strategies for managing stress.**

October Prevention Principle

Teaching children healthy ways to identify and manage their emotions helps them to become emotionally healthy individuals.

Emotionally healthy individuals are less likely to use alcohol or drugs as coping tools.