

Adolescent Girls

Parent Fact Sheet #1

Adolescence is a tumultuous time for girls. Despite the struggles of this period of change, adolescence can bring parents an opportunity to help shape the child into the woman she will become. Media tells girls and women to be skinny, wear certain clothes, and participate in certain activities. Recent successes of female athletes have helped to change gender roles and expectations. Parents can help guide adolescents in choosing what activities to be passionate about, regardless of cultural views. Arguments with friends and the desire to be attractive, coupled with the increased drive to form an identity, can make adolescence a challenge for girls.

Key Facts

- 1. Adolescent girls will change how they feel about activities and obligations, and this change can contribute to their development of identity¹.**
Adolescent girls may change how they feel about their involvement in certain activities —such as participating in extracurricular pursuits—during this period of life. Pressure from friends, family, or society can contribute to this change, especially in terms of the girls' interest in developing romantic relationships.
- 2. Media messages lead many adolescents to try to conform to rigid gender roles².** Despite recent strong female role models, many adolescent girls feel pressured to conform to gender roles seen in media. Young girls need a variety of positive perceptions of being a woman, such as recent advances in female sports. Because limiting the media's influence is almost impossible, providing girls with information about quality role models is vital. Parents should try to discuss relevant media messages with their children.
- 3. Dramatic changes in adolescence are marked by lower levels of satisfaction with self and environment.** During late childhood (ages 5-9), many girls show a wide interest in everything. However, once they enter adolescence they begin to focus more on what they are struggling with instead of what they can achieve. As girls develop, what has been referred to as their "false self" can emerge³. Many times even if girls can see how they are altering their behavior, they still choose to conform with their peer group or social norms to meet the expectations of their friends and culture.

Implication for Parents

Parents should be supportive and nurturing throughout their daughter's adolescence. During this time children may pull away from their family; however, parents must still find a way to interact with their daughter, even in a limited way, and continue to support her despite her tendency to pull away. As a daughter ends the tumultuous period of adolescence, a

parent should embrace the young woman she has become.

Additional Resources

Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls by Mary Pipher (available at all major bookstores)

Parenting tips from FamilyEducation.com: <http://life.familyeducation.com/teen/girls-self-esteem/34454.html>

About the Author

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¹ Klimstra, T., Hale, W., Raaijmakers, Q., Branje, S., & Meeus, W. (2008). Identity formation in adolescence: change or stability? *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 39, 150-162.

² Witt, P., & Caldwell, L. (2005). *Recreation and youth development*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing Inc.

³ Pipher, M. (1994). *Reviving Ophelia: saving the selves of adolescent girls*. New York: Ballantine Books.

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