

# QUICK FACTS ABOUT ADOLESCENCE

From Growing in the Way of Love



## Teaching the Way of Love

Parenting With the Heart of Christ

For parents whose  
children are  
approaching puberty.



*...conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed". Therefore, the formation of conscience requires being enlightened about the truth and God's plan and must not be confused with a vague subjective feeling or with personal opinion.*

*Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality #95*

The brain is one of the most intriguing parts of the human person. This amazing organ consists of several lobes and structures that have specialized functions. Collectively, the brain contains what is learned and valued, what is felt and preferred, what is feared and remembered. Physiologically, it is the center of one's human potential.

Before magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) technology, most scientists believed that the human brain reached maturity before puberty. It was widely believed that the brain was ready for adult thinking and reasoning before the teen years started. However, after MRIs made brain scans possible, scientists had to admit that their original assumption was totally incorrect. Images of the teen brain clearly revealed that full adult reasoning happened after the age of twenty.

Here is what researchers discovered. The brain develops progressively from the back to the front. During infancy, the lobes at the back gather the information collected through the eyes, ears, touch and smell. This sensory input sculpts how the brain will function. As the infant becomes a child, the lobes sort the information that comes from the senses and categorizes it, sending it to specific locations in the brain. For example, language skills are processed in the left brain and movement is governed by the part of the brain just above the spine. As the teen years approach, the front of the brain, which is the responsible for skilled movements, mood, planning for the future, setting goals and judgment, finally starts its maturation.

The major brain activity for an adolescent is the completion of the circuitry that connects all of the

lobes to the frontal cortex. This delicate and complex rewiring of the brain determines the capacity for thinking and decision making in the adult years. The development is slow, taking most of the teenage years to complete. What does all of this mean? Practically, the brain inside of a teen's skull is not fully functional and should be treated as such.

This may seem unsettling and cause a parent to question God's design for human maturity. Why would the Almighty pair such important brain development with the changes that come during puberty? It seems almost comical that the brain is designed to mature under the influence of reproductive hormones. Despite this skepticism, God's plan for human growth and development is meant to follow this basic process.

It is difficult to understand the mystery of God and his hand in human development. As we mentioned in an earlier segment in this series, human maturity includes much more than the body looking and functioning as an adult. And, it is much more than the mind becoming capable of adult reasoning. Human maturity is about the total and absolute combination of one's body with one's mind. And, as the body and mind are united, it is essential that the spirit of God is also integrated into the person.

God created human persons so that the body, mind and spirit work together. The development of the brain is crucial to the success of this integration. This is why parents need to pay particular attention to the gradual development and changes that happen during the teen years. Let's look at some practical ways that parents can both smooth the path of adolescence and cope with the confusion that comes with it.

**F**rom the DVD (WATCH THE CLIP THAT CORRESPONDS WITH THIS SEGMENT.)

During adolescence the \_\_\_\_\_ undergoes tremendous development. This means that;

Youth think \_\_\_\_\_ clearly than adults.

Youth find it \_\_\_\_\_ to understand and read emotions.

Youth are \_\_\_\_\_ impulsive and have LESS self-control.

Youth want to be \_\_\_\_\_.

Any use of alcohol and/or drugs (illegal or prescribed) will \_\_\_\_\_ impact the brain's development.

The brain connections that are \_\_\_\_\_ stay in place and those that are not used are \_\_\_\_\_.

Male and female brain development is \_\_\_\_\_.

## **C**ontinue the Discussion

**Read and reflect on the following questions and examples.**

1. Think back to your adolescence. What did your parents do (or not do) to help you become a responsible adult?
2. How does the new information on the developing brain impact your thoughts about parenting during puberty?
3. Sharing a family meal has been identified as a way to increase family connections and reduce risky behaviors. What happens at a family meal that causes these outcomes?
4. The amount and pace of media today is considered detrimental to adolescent brain development. What concerns do you have about your child's use of media? What can you do to limit the impact of the media on your emerging adult?
5. The female and male brains do develop differently. How can a parent respect these differences without pitting one sex against the other?

# Make a Plan

During the DVD segment, several strategies were offered that have the potential to smooth out the path through adolescence. These strategies are listed below. Read through the list and decide which ones you do on a regular basis, which you do some of the time, and which ones you rarely do. Mark your answer in the corresponding column. Use the space below each strategy to justify your answer. Review your answers and select three actions from the sometimes or rarely list that you would like to do regularly. Write those behaviors in the space provided on the next page and add your ideas on when and how you are going to integrate them into your family life over the next month.

| How often do you...  | Regularly | Sometimes | Rarely |
|--|-----------|-----------|--------|
| Engage your child in regular conversation?                           |           |           |        |
| Stand firm when your child is emotional?                             |           |           |        |
| Calmly face issues that arise during emotional outbursts?            |           |           |        |
| Spend one to one time with your child?                               |           |           |        |
| Ask your child to STOP and THINK before ACTING impulsively?          |           |           |        |
| Let your child invite friends to your home?                          |           |           |        |
| Supervise the activities that happen at your home?                   |           |           |        |
| Talk with your child about the negative aspects of drug and alcohol? |           |           |        |
| Eat a meal with your family?   |           |           |        |
| Provide a calm and quiet home for your child?                        |           |           |        |
| Approach your son differently from your daughter?                    |           |           |        |
| Respect the sexual differences between males and females?            |           |           |        |

The three behaviors that I want to do regularly are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Here are my ideas on how I will make these happen.

***Much of the formation in the home is indirect...for it arises from the presence and example of parents whose love is pure and generous. If parents are given confidence in this task of education for love, they will be inspired to overcome the challenges and problems of our times by their own ministry of love.***

***Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality #149***

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