

Ch Ch Ch Ch Changes

A Parents'/Carers' Guide

As your child grows slowly into an adult, this can be a challenging time, so we've come up with 3 Top Tips:

1. Remember the changes are natural and happen to every child
2. Build your listening skills
3. Find your own tactics for conversation

1. The changes are natural and happen to every child

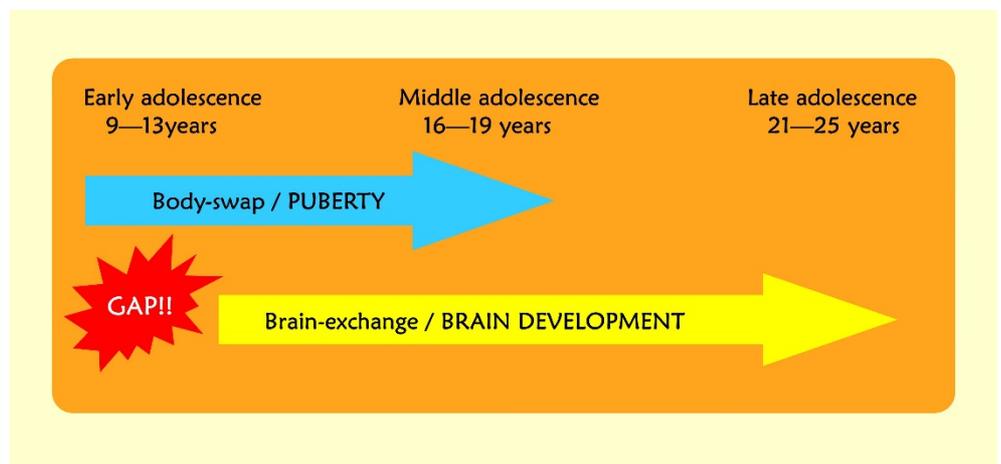
Does it seem like your son or daughter is changing in front of your eyes? Well in fact they are.

Recent brain development studies have discovered that when in early adolescence your child's body starts to change due to puberty (**the body-swap*), these changes are followed by major brain changes (**brain-exchange*), which continue on into their mid twenties.

These changes to the brain are perfectly normal (even if they don't seem like it) – they are the reason why your child is acting and thinking differently – for example hardly talking at all or talking much more than they did, being more interested in their friends than their family and testing their place in the world, by taking risks.

Essential developments in the teenage brain and body

It has been found that the body is growing up more quickly than the brain is, this mismatch creates a gap.



A bit like starting the engine without training the driver!

**Not real scientific terms!*

During these years of change your child might seem to withdraw from you and no longer tell you about their feelings and what is going on in their lives.

Here are two ways to help you communicate better with your pre-teen, so you can support them during this time of change.

'Half a conversation's better than no conversation at all...'

2. Cultivate your listening skills

- Being able to listen is really valuable, as it's the first step to helping your child feel they can tell you what they're thinking and feeling. As they may not understand it all themselves.
- When your child is telling you something, even when it doesn't seem so important to you (like every detail of how to play a new video game)—listen to what they are saying.
- This opens the door to them realising that you care about what is important to them—it builds trust.

3. Find your own tactics for conversation

- You might need to find some new tactics for conversation. They work well when they take place as part of doing something practical together—like walking the dog, doing some baking, walking to the match or driving to the shops.
- By talking casually about other things, you might find a good time to ask a question about something more important – and you might get a few minutes of deeper conversation.
- Those few minutes could be all it takes for them to open up about something that's bothering them, so you can help them be more resilient to cope with what's happening in their lives.

Further suggestions

- Talk to other parents/carers about your experiences of raising pre-teens – sharing your experiences and tactics can be really helpful.
- Lots of people are going through the same thing, yet everyone's experience is different and there could be something to learn from each other.

Want more info?

For more on issues for parents / carers raising pre-teens and adolescent brain development go to:

- <http://www.mindmate.org.uk/im-a-parent-or-carer> A website for children and young people in Leeds that provides practical tools, information and signposting to support mental health and emotional wellbeing.
- <http://www.pta.org.uk/Parents/Supporting-my-childs-learning/Preparing-to-move-to-secondary>
- http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/articles/brain_development_teenagers

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