

Teens and Mood Swings (www.kidshealth.org)

Adolescent's moods swings are not only confusing to parents, but they are also draining. It is not fun to walk around as if on eggshells in fear a 16 year old might erupt or become weepy. It is also not a good idea to try to punish the bad mood out of the youngster.

Researchers have discovered that the brain continues to grow and develop through adolescence much more than originally thought. Because the brain reaches 90% of its full size by the age of six, it has historically been believed that it had also reached almost full development. Now it is believed that the brain changes much more during the teenage years than previously believed. The grey matter on the outer part of the brain thickens over time with this process peaking at age 11 in females and age 12 in males.

After this process is over, the brain begins to trim away excess grey matter that is not used, leaving only the information that the brain needs and making the brain more efficient. One of the last areas to go through this trimming process is the prefrontal cortex, which is the area of the brain responsible for judgment, self-control, and planning. This means that while adolescents have very strong emotions and passions, they don't have the mechanisms in place to control these emotions. This is one reason behind teenage mood swings.

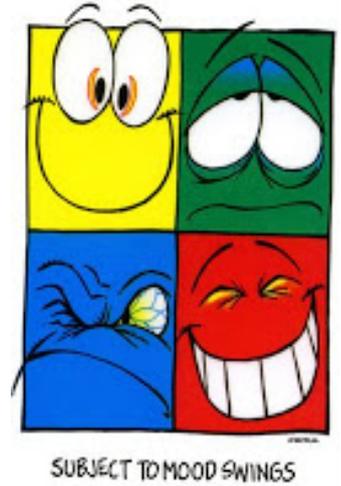
Another biological factor is that this is when the body starts producing sex hormones as well as going through a major growth spurt. The physical changes that adolescents experience cause them to feel strange and perhaps confused or uncomfortable, and this erodes their sense of security. Because of the effect that this has on their psychological state, they may strike out or experience conflicting moods.

Adolescents have not yet developed the ability to deal with the pressures, frustrations, and anxieties of life. As their lives become more complicated and adult-like, they don't have the built-in coping mechanisms that grown-ups have developed to help them deal, so they are prone to react very emotionally to situations. Also, adolescents are typically very preoccupied with identity formations and becoming entities with lives separate from those of their moms and dads. This, again, can cause confusion or frustration. While the world seems to be changing constantly around them, they feel as though they can't keep up or handle the pressure, and this will inevitably lead to a slightly off-kilter emotional state.

What Parents Can Do—

Here are a few tips you can use to help your teenager learn to control or deal with his/her mood swings:

1. Allow your adolescents to wait out the mood. If they need a good cry or to just pace around their room, give them their privacy to do it. Offer comfort and let your adolescents know you are there if they need to talk.
2. Always take the upper road as the mother or father.
3. Don't take their mood swings personally. Don't let their moods alienate you from them. As moms and dads we tend to get our feelings hurt when our kids don't respond to us positively. It is important to remember that the mother/father must react in the more mature manner and always forgive the kids and keep your heart open to them.



4. Encourage your adolescents to identify what is happening. Help them recognize the signs of their bad moods, so they know what is happening. Let them know that they are not alone, this happens to most people.
5. Encourage your adolescent to take preventative steps through creativity and being involved. Being involved in a hobby will help your adolescent's moods stay on an even keel. It will teach him/her more coping skills and resilience.
6. Give them room and allow them to be miserable or sad for a period. Of course you will need to watch them to be sure they don't get depressed, but don't deny them the right to be sad or to need time alone.
7. Look for moments when they may be willing to talk. Just like they have times when they are in bad moods, they will also have good moments. Take advantage of these times to relate to them what you went through at the same age so they will know they are not alone.
8. Never let your youngster's bad mood cause you to react in anger.
9. Recognise what is happening. Do not be too busy that you aren't looking at the situation correctly and go directly into 'discipline mode'. Know that it isn't just your child, this is normal for adolescents. It isn't easy to deal with bad or sad feelings when you can't figure out what is wrong.
10. Stay firm where behaviour is concerned. While you cannot dictate how they feel, you can dictate how they react. Don't allow a bad mood to mean disrespect of you, other elders. Also, don't allow them to be hurtful to siblings. If this happens, you must demand that they apologize.
11. Support a healthy lifestyle in your home. Getting enough rest and eating right goes a long way for anyone's mood. This is also an opportunity for parents to model the appropriate behaviour.
12. Teach your adolescent coping skills. When he/she is calm, use role play and show them how to count back from 10, go for a walk or listen to music. Modelling these appropriate behaviours when you are in a bad mood will help your adolescent be better prepared.

Mood swings can leave an adolescent feel like they're out of control, which is a very uncomfortable state for anyone to be in. Of course, if the mood swings are severely abnormal or prolonged the adolescent should see a professional about other possible issues. Normal teen mood swings can make an adolescent feel unbalanced, though, and are not to be taken lightly.

Here are some tips for what your adolescent can do when dealing with a mood swing:

- **Exercise** - exercise releases endorphin into the blood stream, and these chemicals can help to regulate mood and ease frustration
- **Get creative** – painting, drawing, writing, or building something can help an adolescent to express their emotions in a healthy way
- **Get plenty of rest** – regular sleep helps keep the mind in tip-top shape
- **Realize that they're not alone** – talking to a friend or peer who is dealing with the same issues will make them feel less abnormal and help them realize that they are not crazy
- **Take a breather** – stepping back and trying to look at the situation from another angle, counting to ten, or just sitting with the uncomfortable feelings for a moment will help the adolescent to realize that it's not as bad as it seems