

ADOLESCENCE AND PUBERTY



**AUTISTIC TEENS MAY HAVE DIFFICULTY
UNDERSTANDING WHAT IS HAPPENING IN
BOTH BODY AND MIND**

The adolescent years are a time of change for young people. Adolescence is typically thought of as the teenage years. Puberty can start earlier for some children where the bodily changes begin as early as 8. An Autistic and those with ADHD may find it challenging to adapt to the changes associated with this time in their life. Adolescence is a time of growth in the body and in the developing brain. Biological changes are affecting physical growth and emotional responsiveness. There may be some differences in the development of neural pathways between those with ND and those without ND. It is not fully understood what the differences are and how they are expressed. There are also many environmental changes, such as changes in social expectations and school.

AUTISM

Some Autistic teens may experience greater sensory sensitivity during puberty, possibly due to the change in hormones in the body. Some Autistics have difficulty recognising different emotions and responding with a socially acceptable response to the emotions they feel. Autistic teens may have difficulty understanding what is happening in both body and mind and find it more challenging to moderate any of the characteristics of their Autism, such as stimming behaviour or an intense special interest as puberty begins.

New social rules develop amongst teenagers during this time. Autistic teens may also find it challenging to make sense of the new social rules that most of their peers may be following. It may be confusing when someone shows a romantic interest or when they would experience a romantic attraction. During adolescence, the rules of social interaction may become more nuanced. It is a time when most individuals feel confused or act in ways that can be confusing. There may be times when some teenagers try to take advantage of their peers or will be insincere. For an Autistic teen, this may be very difficult and create situations where they could be vulnerable or taken advantage of due to a limited understanding of the new and changing social rules. The gap in understanding the changing social rules can leave teenagers who do not understand at a significant disadvantage if they attempt to engage with their peers.

The physiological changes associated with adolescence are menstruation, body hair, body odour, and acne. Coping with these changes might create difficulties if the teenager does not understand what is happening, why it is happening, the importance of good hygiene, and the effect poor hygiene could have on social relationships. These sudden changes are unsettling and sometimes happen very quickly, increasing the difficulties of coping with everyday demands.

Kidshealth.org is an excellent website to look at and encourage your teen to look at, as they have several good articles on puberty for Autistic teens to help them understand the changes that are happening to them.

This is a good article for boys:

www.kidshealth.org/en/teens/autism-puberty-boys.html

This is an article on how to start conversations and socialise:

www.kidshealth.org/en/teens/autism-conversation.html

There is also a Facebook group called Autism and Puberty for parents to chat with other parents who also have Autistic children and young people who are going through puberty.

ADHD

Being accepted by your peers and developing positive social relationships are important at all times, especially during the adolescent period. ADHD characteristics can be a potential hindrance in developing positive social relationships. The ADHD adolescent may appear younger or might be less emotionally mature. They may find it unsettling to adjust to the many changes they experience. During adolescence, many teens turn to their peers to make sense of their confusion. The ADHD teen may find this difficult if they do not have a strong social network. They might be vulnerable to joining a social group that engages in antisocial behaviour because they accept them.

Risk-taking increases for many as they enter their teen years. The ADHD teen who struggles with impulsivity and has difficulty making decisions may find this stage of life tricky to negotiate. Adolescence is a time of experimentation, and this might include using alcohol and other drugs. Risky behaviour can happen at any time of the day but frequently happens during the night or when parents are out of the home. It is important to be an educated parent concerning the signs of any drug use, so any concerns will be recognised and addressed to prevent a problem from developing into a major concern.

During the secondary school years, the academic demands and school environment changes. A child who struggles with organisation and concentration may require additional support and adaptations to manage their increased workload.

Teenagers are trying to find their way to becoming an independent adult. As they journey from childhood, they will want to exert their autonomy. Some ADHD teens may decide to stop taking prescribed medication as a means of exerting their independence. Having honest and open conversations about the choice to take medication or not take it may help teenagers express their independence in a more positive way.

The key to supporting either an Autistic teen or an ADHD teen is to be patient, understanding, and keep an eye on how they are coping, mentally, with this new stage of life, and help support them where they need it.

ADHD GIRLS

This article is on how to understand the effect that puberty has:

[www.verywellmind.com/
does-puberty-affect-adhd-in-
girls-20738](http://www.verywellmind.com/does-puberty-affect-adhd-in-girls-20738)

ADHD BOYS

This article is on how to understand the effect that puberty has:

[www.additudemag.com/
boys-2-men-when-adhd-and-
puberty-collide/](http://www.additudemag.com/boys-2-men-when-adhd-and-puberty-collide/)

FIRST PERSON EXPERIENCE BY EEVIE AGE 11

I don't like talking about puberty...

...Because I don't like anything about it. I think it's ok not to like talking about it, but teachers think you should listen and talk about it even if you don't want to, and I really don't like that.

I don't know if I will get used to it, but my Mum says I probably will because she did. But just because she did doesn't mean I will.

I really don't like periods. They feel horrible and are annoying. Sometimes they hurt, and sometimes they make me feel sick. It means that when you're older, you can have a baby, but I want to adopt anyway so I can give a baby a safe home. So I don't really need them, but they happen anyway.

Other things that have happened are being taller, but I have always been tall. Body hair - YUCK! Wearing a bracelet. And remembering deodorant. My Mum always goes on about it. Sometimes I feel moody, like really sad or really angry, and I don't know why. I don't like change, and puberty is your whole body changing. Some of my friends have changed a bit and act weird. I don't know if it's puberty, but my best friend hasn't been herself.

