

Supporting Adolescent Emotional Wellbeing

Emotions often run high during adolescence due to all the restructuring in the brain, plus hormones interacting in this process. So, while there is more activity in the emotional sections of the brain (the limbic system) there is also disruption in the planning and impulse control parts of the brain (the frontal lobes and the prefrontal cortex).

Both adolescent girls and boys may be overly sensitive emotionally, if there are differences of opinions, problems with friends or disagreements at home. Sometimes the teenage emotional brain can overtake their rational brain, and this can result in outbursts or meltdowns that appear to be a complete overreaction to the situation. In fact, adolescents tend to think more with the amygdala which is the emotional part of the brain while adults think with the pre-frontal cortex.

This is important to understand because it will help you in the way you react to your adolescent when they are in an emotional state. It is important to also not dismiss their emotions as 'just being an adolescent.' Adolescents need their emotions validated and need help to manage them better. This doesn't mean suppressing them but simply means recognising the effects their emotions may have on their thinking and their bodies and learning healthy and acceptable ways of emotional expression. Having parents that model healthy emotional expression is also important.





Top Tips for Dads

- A calm voice and relaxed tone from you can help settle the situation.
- Let your teenager know you will listen and try to understand their point of view.
- Let them know it is okay to talk about how they are feeling. Naming their emotion and explain it can actually help your child to calm down. "Tell me what you are feeling" "Explain to me why this is this upsetting you?/making you so angry?"
- Listen with an open mind. Even when an agreement cannot be reached, teenagers are more likely to do what their parents wish if they feel that their parents listened to them with an open mind.
- 'Cooling off' time. If you feel that your teenager or you are getting too emotional, angry or upset it is better to take a time out and let things cool down.
- Choose your battles wisely. Be aware of which issues are not worth the drama and let these things go. Wait for a calmer moment to bring up those issues you need to follow up on.
- Giving up the need for control doesn't mean you are giving in. The aim should always be to have a rational conversation and come to an agreement. The problem is more likely to be solved if your child is also involved in finding the solution.



Wellbeing Check



As fathers, you play an important role in helping your adolescent children develop their emotional skills and understandings and their resilience to cope during difficult times. They will watch you and how you respond during these times and the strategies you use. When you are aware of your own emotional wellbeing, you naturally become a positive role model the kinds of skills, attitudes, and behaviours your children need to master.