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Listening, learning, and living together: it's the science of life.

Teens' Developmental Tasks ¹

Rebecca McGovney and Millie Ferrer²

As your children enter their teen years, they begin a physical and emotional journey that will bring them into adulthood, and parents can play an important role in helping them establish who they are.

Teenagers begin to interact with each other in more adult ways as they mature. Experts at the University of Florida say this is linked to physical development, and that peer groups may change during the teen years as they grow at different rates. While their bodies are changing, teens also are learning to accept their appearance.

Sexual maturity also occurs during the teen years. Teens begin to define what it means to be male or female, though most conform to society's definitions of gender. UF researchers say teens often confuse sexual feelings with intimacy, and don't get into long-term relationships until later years.

Another teen process many of us are familiar with is establishing independence from parents and other adults. Although many Americans do not gain economic independence until after long schooling, it's during the teen years that they begin to consider careers and financial independence.

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Teens also begin to determine their own values and beliefs, although research shows these are usually based on their parents' values and beliefs. They also begin to work towards socially responsible behavior, such as employment or marriage. So while parents may feel overwhelmed by the tide of what feels like counterassaults on what they've taught their children, it's important to remember they still have tremendous influence.

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