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Course support



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**COURS SUPPORT**

Erasmus + project: "Talking to my teenager"

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#### Partners

- ZIVAC Group Central srl - Bucharest, Romania
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- The Association of Parents from the Technological High School no. 1 - Alexandria, Romania
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<i>Content</i>	<i>Page</i>
Project information	3
Table of Contents	4
Introduction	7
1. <b><i>Chapter I – CHANGES THAT OCCUR IN ADOLESCENCE</i></b>	8
1.1. Adolescence and puberty	8
1.2. Adolescence, the brain and hormones	9
- Exercise 1	10
1.3. Female hormones	12
1.4. Male hormones	13
- Exercise 2	14
1.5. When do teenagers become adults? So when and how does adolescence end?	15
- Exercise 3	16
1.6. A new body	17
- Exercise 4	18
1.7. Know, try	19
1.8. Changes in the brain	20
1.9. Frontal cortex and limbic system	24
- Exercise 5	25

1.10. Dopamine and the reward system	26
1.11. Sexuality	30
1.12. Group and family	30
1.13. The role of the family	31
<b>2. Chapter II – RISKY BEHAVIOR</b>	<b>32</b>
2.1. Pathologies of adolescence	32
2.2. Psychic and social changes	34
2.3. What are risky behaviors	35
2.4. To influence and manage risky behavior	39
- Exercise 6	40
2.5. Common signs of risky behaviors	41
<b>3. Chapter III – COMMUNICATION WITH THE ADOLESCENT</b>	<b>44</b>
3.1. How you can help your teenagers	44
- Exercise 7	47
3.2. The 12 attitudes	48
- Exercise 8	51
3.3. Here's what you can do to help your teen feel listened to and protected	52
3.4. How does a negative communication turn into a positive one?	54

3.5. Educational styles	55
- Exercise 9	57
3.6. Self-esteem	58
3.7. Rules for balancing self-esteem	60
- Exercise 10	61
3.8. Developing effective communication with the adolescent	62
3.9. How can you understand if your teen can have problems	64
3.10. How to create a positive environment	66
3.11. Emotions in adolescence	67
3.12. A good communication with your teenager	70
3.12. Application of the 7 Cs in communication	75
<b>IV BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>77</b>

## Dear Parents

You have probably often wondered where your good, obedient, educated child disappeared and who is the "alien" who took his place when he became a teenager. You were often upset and considered that he no longer listens to you, that he suddenly became ignorant, disobedient, that he no longer speaks to you, that he is no longer interested in anything that happens at home. Your teenager has become a stranger! Which makes you fear for the future, which makes you ashamed of your friends, which does not listen to any words you say to them. But this is not the case. Your teenager is full of fears, anxieties, emotions and feelings that overwhelm him, strangers and uncertainties. Your teenager suffers a lot, maybe more than you, he feels misunderstood and not accepted. This guide is designed to build a bridge between parents and teens so that it is easier for you to understand your teens.

**Who are you and  
what did you do  
with my teenager?**



So let's look together at some of the major changes that can occur when a child goes into pre-adolescence and adolescence.

Adolescence is that long, complex and, at the same time, extraordinary period of transition from childhood to adulthood, characterized by many changes. This phase of life is still surrounded by myths that describe it as a dark and uncontrollable period due to hormones and lack of maturity. True, teenagers behave in a bizarre, seemingly inappropriate way, they tend to adopt risky behaviors.

# I. CHANGES THAT OCCUR IN ADOLESCENCE

## 1.1. Adolescence and puberty



Between the child who was and the adult who will be adolescence is a period of transition in which there are great physical and psychological changes. Boys develop, reach sexual maturity and form their own way of being and ideas. These transformations happen quite quickly and tend to intrigue and scare at the same time. Psychological changes occur preferably within the group of friends, while the family remains in the background as a fundamental support, but it is no longer the only point of reference, it practically loses its central role for the adolescent. As a result, adolescence is a phase of life characterized by many changes and great instability. These changes are not only physical, but also affect psychological aspects, thinking skills and behavior. The word adolescence derives from the Latin word *adolescere*, which means "to grow".

## 1.2. Adolescence, the brain and hormones

**But what does it mean for a child to grow up?**

**When does adolescence begin and end?**



Hormones are the ones that manage all or almost all of our biology. Objectively, it is so! It all starts from conception, during intrauterine life the effect of hormones affects the growth and development of organs, which allow the development of man or woman of our species. Around the age of 8-10, the triggers of puberty begin the big changes, and the biological ones representative for adolescence begin around the age of 13-15. An biologically important event that each of us she lived it in person and perhaps indirectly with their children. Slammed doors, discussions, screams or silence for a long time. These are some of the ways in which young people can express themselves. Adolescence in some boys does shape the mood, reactivity, how to behave, but much of this behavior depends largely on sex hormones that act to shape the brain of the boy or girl.

## Exercise 1



**Empathy:** Putting yourself in the shoes of the teenager is important to understand his position given the feelings he has caused by the changes that take place:

- Sit on the couch with a classmate as you would with your teenager. The colleague will play the role of the teenager.
- Ask them to talk about their physical traits
- Make a comparison between what you think about what your classmate looks like and what he or she is exposing
- Note the differences
- Keep in mind that your teenager looks different from what you see



The neuroendocrine evolution of adolescence is not the result of what is happening in hormonal terms at that time or what was activated a week before, but is the result of an evolutionary path conditioned by the hormonal moment that

takes place over several years. In fact, adolescence is the final stage of functional growth of an organ, the brain, which often during adolescence can suffer from some pathophysiological disorders, even serious, including various mental disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders to drug addiction. In fact, the increase in hormone levels during adolescence organizes neural circuits in functional terms.

During adolescence, many dopamine-secreting neurons in the base of the brain increase their synaptic connections. These neurons are the basis of the neural circuit of "satisfaction" that develops just with puberty and adolescence. Studies also show that girls' brains evolve before that of boys of the same age during pubertal development, especially in areas involved in emotional control, decision-making. These events are not so serious for the hormonal disturbance itself, but for what the brain suffers even in the period in which it completes its development, in a period in which it is particularly receptive and organized. This probably involves changes, even permanent ones, in the future functional capacities of the brain.

That is why the brain is very fragile due to its malleability and extreme sensitivity to hormonal changes. Therefore, boys and girls are genetically different, but many of their real differences depend on how their development is achieved and completed, how environmental conditions interfere with the maturation of the brain through the hormonal environment.

The changes in the body that occur during adolescence are very noticeable in both boys and girls. They appear gradually and are caused by the action of certain substances, sex hormones, produced by some glands in the human body. Usually, girls start producing sex hormones at the age of 11-12, boys a little later, between 12 and 13 years old. Sex hormones initiate a series of physical events and transformations, such as height increase, which prepares the child's body for real sexual development. But let's see in detail what happens.

### 1.3. Female hormones



In girls, the most abundant sex hormones are estrogen. They are responsible for increasing the volume of the breasts. However, other hormones are produced, including androgens, which are responsible for pubic and underarm hair growth (and are also responsible for those annoying pimples that often destroy the face: acne). The development of the breasts and pubic hair are called secondary sexual characteristics (the primary sexual characteristics are the genitals) and their appearance precedes sexual development. During adolescence, sexual maturity and therefore reproductive ability are reached. Girls have their first menstruation, a bleeding from the uterus that is repeated every month and is related to the cyclic production of a cell by the ovary, the female genital organ, a cell called the egg and which together with the boy's sperm can lead to a child. These events are due to the production of different types of sex hormones, the concentration of which varies throughout the month. In the first few months or years, menstruation can be very irregular, both in terms of the amount of blood lost and the number of days that pass between one cycle and another; they can also be quite painful.

## 1.4. Male hormones



In boys, the hormones produced in larger quantities are androgens, which increase height and muscles, decrease voice tone, increase the volume of the penis and testicles (male genitals) and ejaculation, ie the emission of fluid containing male semen cells - sperm it forms in the testicles.

Sexual maturity is thus completed. This means that both boys and girls can already have children. Sexual maturity takes place before cultural and social maturity. The tendency to prolong studies delays the entry into professional life and this, in turn, postpones the end of adolescence. Until a few centuries ago - or even today, in societies other than ours - sexual development was more or less contemporary with entering professional life, taking on responsibilities and starting a family. Also, the age of menstruation over the centuries has decreased from about 17 years to 11 -12 years, today. And until the last century, it was not uncommon for a girl to get married at the age of 17. The distance that exists today between the moment when the human body becomes an adult and when the mind becomes can confuse young people, so they feel very far from a recent past, when they were children, but not big enough and strong as adults.

## Exercise 2



**Listen carefully** to your teenager without interrupting or anticipating him when he talks, when he gets angry, when he shares secrets with you, let him talk by listening carefully. In this way you will clarify that you are really interested in listening to him and understanding him. Then you can summarize what he said, tell him your opinion and why you think so.

- Sit on the couch with a classmate as you would with your teenager. The colleague will play the role of the teenager.
- The colleague will start talking and telling something
- Listen until it's all over, at least 10 minutes, without interrupting it at all
- After the colleague has finished speaking, thank him



### **1.5. When do teenagers become adults? So when and how does adolescence end?**



There is no precise answer to this question. From a physical point of view, the growth ends around 18-20 years. Therefore, the beginning of maturity could be placed around this age. But this does not mean that young people between the ages of 18 and 20 are always completely autonomous and independent, that they no longer need to be helped and guided by family and society in various aspects of their lives. Moreover, it must also be said that in reality a boy who has just finished school or is going to university has to worry a lot about what he is doing, such as the cost of rent or the difficulty of finding a job or change it. Prolonged stay in families, therefore, on the one hand, gives children more time to mature, on the other hand, makes this maturation delayed. Roles in the family tend to change less quickly than the speed of change in adolescents; often parents cannot keep up with the constant fluctuations typical of this era. I see teenagers sometimes showing more childish behaviors (such as asking for hugs and caresses, asking for homework help, declaring an inability to do simpler things) and other times showing adult behaviors (sexual activity, political commitment, taking responsibility, physical improvement).

## Exercise 3



**Accept the teenager as he is**, brilliant or mediocre, he is your child. The more you ask him to be in a certain way, the more likely he will be mediocre or unhappy if that way of being is far from his desire.

- Sit on the couch with a classmate as you would with your teenager. The colleague will play the role of the teenager.
- It will describe him and his behavior
- Say out loud after each sentence of your classmate: I accept you for what you want to be, but not with indifference or tolerance but with love.



## 1.6. A new body



We talked, but only physically, about the hormonal storm that characterizes adolescence. The transformations that take place in children's bodies, however, go hand in hand with other transformations, or even cause them. The body's maturity and ability to use it for reproductive purposes can be overwhelming. Sometimes the changes are so rapid and so great that it can be difficult for a teenager to recognize himself in the mirror. He may feel that he cannot control his evolving body and that he is almost a stranger. Some find it very difficult to give up the appearance of a child, so much so that they try to mask their secondary sexual characteristics. Instead, others can highlight them to show all the transformations that have taken place. However, all teenagers are fascinated by this new dimension which is the sexual body and try to get acquainted with it, to understand it, to explore it. The period of adolescence, sexual maturity (puberty) is characterized by physical, neuro hormonal and mental transformations through which the body of a child becomes an adult body capable of reproduction. At this stage begins the activity of the sex glands. Differences between boys and girls before puberty are limited to the genitals. However, during puberty, other differences develop, which include: for girls early menstrual cycle, axillary and

pubic hair growth, for boys vocal change (voice becomes thicker) pubic and facial hair growth, erections. All these transformations are happening fast. By the age of 17, teenagers can already be young men and women, taller and more robust than their parents and able to have children themselves. The speed of these changes in some teens can cause concern about the transformation they are experiencing and their appearance. Not knowing that this process varies depending on individual characteristics (eg sex) and external factors (nutrition), they may be concerned, especially if such changes occur sooner or later than in their peers. In adolescence, along with radical physical changes, the ability to introspect is accentuated, ie the comparison with colleagues of the same age becomes more intense and everyone tends to compare himself with a physical model considered ideal. Many teenagers are dissatisfied with their appearance, tend not to accept themselves, even for no reason, and feel that they are not liked by others.

## Exercise 4



**Show the teen that he or she is being listened to.** When the teenager speaks to you, he will feel good if you listen to him, using your words and gestures.

- Sit on the couch with a classmate as you would with your teenager. The colleague will play the role of the teenager.
- When the colleague speaks with a smile, nod, caress him
- Use words like: aha, interesting, I understand

## 1.7. Know, try

Perhaps the most important thing that teenagers look for with these contacts is knowledge, confidence in the new body they are in, in order to better understand it, they are also looking for something in the body of their friends. Girls compare, for example, their breasts, legs or skin; boys, genitals, muscles or height. At the same time, they are beginning to take an interest in individuals of the opposite sex. First loves are sometimes secret, because the fear of being rejected can make the teenager shy and uncomfortable; we prefer to live the experience of love in fantasy. It's a way to prepare. In other cases, however, it is about loves lived very intensely, the first couple experiences and the first sexual experiences appear. Sometimes, unfortunately, these are disappointing experiences, and in some cases, this depends on the fact that the teenager is still too busy trying to understand himself and his body in order to really take care of the other.



## 1.8. Changes in the brain



Important developments occur in brain cells during adolescence, often related to hormonal changes.

The main changes concern:

- limbic system, the area responsible for processing pleasure, emotional responses and sleep regulation
- the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for so-called executive functions: decision-making, organization, impulse control and planning for the future.

The psychological and social sciences have investigated the causes of these behaviors in hormonal changes and in the cultural context; the adolescent was described as suffering, violent, antisocial. Nowadays it is possible to give a more complex and complete explanation of the phenomenon of adolescence, which also takes into account the changes that occur in the brain. Recent acquisitions in the fields of neurophysiology and neuroscience of brain development show that there are precise neurological reasons for typical adolescent behaviors. Taking

into account these aspects of adolescent growth allows us not to stigmatize adolescents, to build effective relationships with them and to invest in them, because at this stage they are particularly receptive and plastic. Therefore, by discovering the mechanisms of brain function, it is possible to fully understand the reasons for adolescents' behaviors and to be able to read them in a more functional way.

Thus, brain changes result in the appearance of four mental characteristics: creative exploration, greater emotional intensity, social involvement, the search for novelty.

- Creative exploration: in adolescence the conquest of formal thinking allows the adolescent to reason in an abstract way, these new thinking and reasoning skills allow adolescents to be innovative and creative.

- Higher emotional intensity: at the same time there is an intensification of emotions that gives the adolescent the vitality typical of this age group, but which can be maintained throughout life.

- Social involvement: young people experience skills and relationships. The peer group becomes fundamental, teenagers create their own identity through the other which becomes a mirror in which to review their fears and perplexities. The connections that are created at this age could become a support network for the entire life course, but at the same time, your child could make decisions and behave dangerously just to get the approval of others.

- The search for novelty: in adolescence, in addition, the impulse towards satisfaction becomes strong, so towards the discovery of new experiences that do not exclude even risky behaviors.

Each of these characteristics has positive and negative aspects and can involve risks or benefits in the life of the adolescent.

Neurological and behavioral changes in adolescents.

During adolescence, the brain prepares for a profound revolution. Structural and functional changes occur in the cortical and subcortical brain areas

and these processes improve the efficiency of information processing and the speed of communication of neurons. The adult human being has about 85 billion neurons in the brain, these cells are constantly forming and decomposing, as well as the so-called synapses or connections between them. From birth, gray matter and brain volume increase, reaching a peak density at the end of childhood. The brain in this phase is rich in neurons and synapses, which are still disordered and go beyond what is really needed. In order to keep the brain network organized and efficient, from pre-adolescence to the age of twenty, a process called synaptic cutting begins, which eliminates, by the end of adolescence, 50% of the synapses that formed during childhood, leaving the most important connections and eliminating those that no longer seem necessary. The brain reacts to the way we focus our attention on the activities we perform, selecting the synapses we use the most. The more circuits used, the stronger they become, the less likely they are to be used in adolescence. The result is that between 20 and 25 years the volume of gray matter has decreased, the number of synapses is almost halved, but they are more robust, orderly and therefore functional.

It would seem a contradiction that just when the person needs his maximum brain power, he is under such a drastic reduction in nerve connections. In reality, it is a phenomenon that serves to improve efficiency, the turmoil that is created in the adolescent's brain aims to move from a brain with many poorly connected neurons to one with fewer neurons, integrated into well-connected circuits. This is what happens when you cut a rose bush, the weakest branches are cut, so that the most important ones can become stronger. At the same time, the development of the white matter is completed in the adolescent brain, which consists of fibers that bind areas of the brain and are enriched with myelin. Myelin is an insulating sheath that covers the axons (communication pathways) of neurons and improves the efficiency of neural conductivity, making the transmission of messages faster. During adolescence, the amount of myelin almost doubles in some regions of the brain, making the spread of nerve messages even faster, like a high-speed train.

These processes, which involve gray matter and white matter, allow for improvement rapid cognitive. This knowledge has important repercussions on education, prevention and intervention. Therefore, in this period of life, the brain undergoes a profound restructuring work that makes it particularly adaptable and malleable, which is why adolescence is defined as the second window of opportunity. It is a time of development when the brain is maximally plastic, ready to receive stimuli and respond optimally. Teenagers have a fantastic opportunity to learn and it should be essential for them to take as many courses as possible so that they can fully exploit the potential of the brain. At the same time and for the same brain development mechanisms, the adolescent brain is more fragile and vulnerable. Exposure to traumatic or toxic factors can easily have negative effects at this stage of life. Some studies show, for example, a thinning of the cerebral cortex among adolescents who abuse alcohol which would lead to inhibition of cell multiplication.



## **1.9. Frontal cortex and limbic system**

Different parts of the human brain have different rates of development during growth. The prefrontal cortex and especially the dorsolateral cortex is the last cortical area that reaches the final thickness, around the age of 30 years. The frontal lobe is the most anterior part of the brain, is much larger in humans than in other species, and handles a number of high-level cognitive functions, executive functions, allows adolescents to think critically, control impulses, and inhibit some inappropriate attitudes, planning events, making informed decisions, prioritizing and organizing thoughts, understanding the intentions and point of view of others. All the skills that seem to be lacking in teenagers and that improve as they go through this period. The specific circuits of the prefrontal cortex are the basis of empathy or the ability to feel and recognize the emotions of others, which allows people to consider interpersonal relationships. Similarly, the ability to put oneself in the other's shoes and to take into account the perspective of others is also developed. For these reasons, it is difficult for teenagers to make decisions based on the emotions of others and to consider different points of view from their own. Basically, the last part of the brain that matures is the one involved in those skills considered more "mature and rational" useful especially in new situations where the use of routine behaviors and skills is no longer enough. Instead, more activity takes place in the limbic areas. The limbic system includes a number of subcortical structures, including the amygdala, located in the deepest and oldest part of the brain and is responsible for emotional regulation and primitive and instinctual reactions. This evidence explains outbursts of anger, impulsive behaviors, and different emotional states, that is, the joy or anger that can ensue from one minute to the next that adolescents are overwhelmed with. Therefore, during adolescence, brain development is not yet complete and there is no effective communication between different regions of the brain, which can

allow decisions to be made by weighing emotion and reason. Consequently, it happens that emotions can appear quickly and intensely, without the executive functions (prefrontal cortex) being able to "slow down" and act as regulators. This is why teenagers seem to be driven by action rather than reflection and emotion than reason.

With this in mind, the adult could give the teenager honest but respectful feedback, help him examine what he has done to improve next time, argue with him about possible alternatives for solving a problem, contributing to development. and evolution. The adult should help the adolescent to go through this period until he or she is able to do it on his or her own, when the prefrontal and limbic areas are well integrated and coordinated with each other and allow the adolescent to develop the ability to resist and and return after conditions of stress and difficulty.

## Exercise 5



**Offer solutions and not criticism.** Your teen will be more receptive if you don't criticize him.

- Sit on the couch with a classmate as you would with your teenager. The colleague will play the role of the teenager.
- The colleague will present a problem
- Give him the solutions that come to mind
- Talk like an equal

## 1.10. Dopamine and the reward system



The limbic system in the adolescent's brain also participates in the reward mechanism. The reward system from an anatomical-functional point of view is a complex structure that originates in the deep nuclei of the brain and is distributed in the centers of the brain responsible for motivational and emotional behavior. Whenever there is satisfaction, physical or psychological, the reward system releases dopamine, a very powerful substance (neurotransmitter) that acts as a booster. The reward circuit urges people to adopt and repeat those behaviors that gave them pleasure and triggers the mechanism of addiction. During adolescence, the baseline level of dopamine is lower than that characteristic of other ages, while its release in relation to experiences is higher. Therefore, teenagers feel bored and look for new, stimulating, exciting experiences, often related to risky behaviors and able to give strong sensations.

A dangerous or forbidden situation is highly desirable for adolescents, because the satisfaction associated with it is perceived as greater. This is why children, especially before the age of 16, adopt risky and meaningless behaviors. Contrary to popular belief, children know the risks, but they need to be reminded

of the consequences of certain behaviors because they cannot resist the challenges that can lead to strong satisfaction. What triggers the behavior of adolescents is not only waiting for the reward, but also receiving it immediately, they are driven by the pursuit of pleasure, but also by impulsivity. Studies known as the Marshmallow Test show how the self-regulation system develops slowly from childhood to adulthood. From these studies it is clear that between a small and immediate satisfaction and a higher, but delayed satisfaction, children generally choose the former, while adolescents certainly choose the former. Therefore, teenagers decide not on what is right, but on what is most immediately pleasing. Peer approval is obviously the most satisfying reward that can exist, so the most dangerous decisions are made in the presence of peers (equalizing effect). The mere presence of colleagues causes dopamine discharges comparable to those obtained from more concrete pleasures such as sex, alcohol and drugs. Therefore, when teenagers take dangerous actions, they know that they are overcoming the limit, but they still try to get the applause of their colleagues, which has a much higher value than the risk. Therefore, adolescents are prone to risky behaviors, are particularly emotional, more prone to aggression and impulsivity, with a braking system still undeveloped. The prefrontal cortex allows adults to process a judgment and make a decision by evaluating the cost-benefit ratio, but in adolescents this area of the brain is still under construction. When it happens that the teenager says "I didn't think about it", he doesn't lie, he often didn't think much about it! The adolescent has the feeling that he dominates the world; the pleasure of taking risks, dangerous driving, high-risk actions, drug use are extremely attractive behavior. A drug, taken out of pure curiosity, for the need for recognition, for impulsivity, for the pure search for strong emotional sensations, induces a release of dopamine in considerable amounts in the adolescent's brain. Due to the described processes and the neuroplasticity with which it is endowed, the adolescent's brain is very fragile and vulnerable and this predisposes him to the development of addictions. We can almost talk about a paradox, the reward

system of basic adolescents is less active, so they need stronger experiences to feel fully satisfied, which predisposes them to adopt risky behaviors that allow a release. higher than dopamine. However, the release of dopamine acts as a powerful reinforcer and can lead to the irrepressible need to put dangerous behavior back into practice. It is reassuring to know that as the prefrontal cortex matures, a new skill develops, the ability to control cognition that allows the adult adolescent to counterbalance the reward system and create a mental space for reflection between impulse and action.

Thus, thanks to the contribution of neuroscience, the phenomenon of adolescence becomes easier to understand. The processes of brain maturation determine that the limbic system, responsible for processing the states of satisfaction, pleasure and emotions to prevail in the adolescent's brain, in front of a prefrontal cortex (executive system, control and regulation) that is still immature, adolescence, with a process of deep restructuring. It is precisely because of these processes that the adolescent has enormous potential, and the neuroplasticity of his brain allows him to learn and be creative at the highest levels. At the same time, it is as if they live in a kind of emotional whirlpool, in which nothing is stable and everything is perceived in an absolute way. Any situation experienced as a danger, a shock or a strong stress, determines instinctive emotional reactions that bypass the rational assessment of the situation. Anger is explosive, sadness becomes despair, joy is pure euphoria. Decision-making for adolescents is driven by the search for immediate satisfaction, without the ability to evaluate alternatives and predict future consequences. It's like teenagers driving a strong, fast emotional car with a small braking system and unassembled parts. This explains the high emotional reactivity, impulsivity, underestimation of risks, pursuit of short-term pleasure, and vulnerability to do anything to gain appreciation, especially from the group and as a result a major vulnerability to psychoactive substances. Due to the fact that the adolescent's brain is still in formation, the experiences they have can have

consequences, so the adolescent must be helped. The mistakes he makes, on the one hand, should not be excessively blamed, because they are necessary to reach maturity, on the other hand, they must be interpreted seriously. If a teenager is at risk, they should know that it is not an adventure, but an event that affects their brain for the rest of their lives. Immaturity of cognitive controls and hypersensitivity to rewards are a vulnerability to risky behaviors; however, these two traits can be strong levers to act on the development of behavior control skills. In this direction, in educational and social contexts, the intelligent use of rewards can impede the pursuit of the pleasure offered by substances and other risky behaviors and can promote the ability to control and regulate the relationship with the substances themselves.

Sport can play a key role in this, a source of pleasure at low prices, is able to activate the brain reward system, develop cognitive and executive functions and develop involvement in social relationships with colleagues in a less rigid context. than the school. Sport is able to provide the elements that contribute the most to increasing the ability to adapt and self-regulate.

Understanding the reasons why the teenager suddenly starts behaving differently than in the past helps you not to scare your dear parents and to avoid adopting authoritarian interventions that will strengthen the rebellion. On the other hand, it also allows you to consider the positive aspects of the adolescent who, full of energy and with such a plastic brain, must be absolutely encouraged to seek genius, creativity, even impulsivity, as a source of experience, guiding him and staying close to him.

## **1.11. Sexuality**

Curiosity about the new body, so quickly transformed in appearance, triggers the first experiences of masturbation: boys begin to touch, caress, manipulate their genitals, now mature, to discover the new sensations they offer and feel pleasure. . Reaching becomes a very important channel of knowledge and also communication. Connections with friends and the group appear. Within these connections there is the possibility to continue exploring the body, both one's own and others'. Going for a walk arm in arm with friends, whispered secrets in the ear, jokes that end with pushing, the resumption of childhood games with hopeful penances (a kiss, a caress), parties in which they dance closely and thousands of occasions when they touch almost by chance are all examples of physical contact search. But they are also the first answers to a growing enthusiasm, which, like all new things, attracts on the one hand and frightens on the other, and is heightened by the embarrassment and difficulty with which even and adults often talk about sex or arousal.

## **1.12. Group and family**

Almost all teenagers are part of a group, school or sports group, but the most important becomes the group of friends at the expense of family. If group membership is so widespread, there are certainly good reasons. In fact, in addition to physical changes, children have to deal with changes in thinking. They become more adept at abstract reasoning, playing with thoughts and words, comparing different opinions, evaluating the pros and cons, the causes and consequences of actions. All this inevitably causes them to ask themselves some difficult questions: who am I? What do I think about this topic? What is right and what is wrong, in my opinion? Can I take for granted what my parents have taught me so far or are there things I disagree with? Certainly, the answer to this last question

is crucial. Adolescence is a time of conflict with the family, which often arises from the desire to confront, assert, and feel that opinions matter as much as those of an adult. Often teenagers do not feel understood by parents and adults in general, they think they are old-fashioned, sometimes ridiculous. Then it becomes essential for teenagers to have someone else with whom they can share experiences, thoughts, dreams and fears. And no one can understand them better than someone in the same situation as them. This is when comparison with friends becomes essential and the group, with its own appearance, its jargon, its own conventional signals, becomes necessary to feel stronger and to be able to cope with adults. Sometimes this grouping tendency degenerates into the formation of real youth gangs.

### **1.13. The role of the family**

The family remains a fundamental point of reference, even if it is no longer alone. Adolescents use it as a safe haven when they feel in difficulty and as a place of confrontation, which is essential to experience their strength and strengthen their identity. Teenagers are often different in the family than they are with friends. The continuous oscillations between these ways of being represent the essence of adolescence itself, ie the transition from child safety to adult safety, adolescence is the age with the greatest uncertainties, the one in which someone puts more at stake and fights for a future. better, based on the principles transmitted by the family and enriched by their own experiences and fantasies, by the beliefs and conclusions drawn from the comparison (with school, friends, reading, cinema, news, travel).

## II. RISKY BEHAVIOR

### 2.1. Pathologies of adolescence



Sometimes it can happen that young people do not bear the complexity of the changes that occur in their body and mind. In these cases, more or less serious psychological disorders may occur. The biggest difficulties usually occur in adolescents who have failed to build a sufficiently solid foundation of security and self-esteem, as can happen in families where parents are too present, intrusive and possessive and therefore make it difficult to position themselves. in the face of difficulties. Or, conversely, when parents, too busy with their own problems, are not paying enough attention to the important things for their teenagers and, in fact, let them grow up without giving them support. Here are some disorders that often occur for the first time during adolescence.

- ❖ *Mood disorders.* The main feature is the changed mood. These include depression, characterized by a series of symptoms - such as loss of appetite, weakness, guilt, suicidal thoughts - placed on a deep sadness.
- ❖ *Anxiety disorders.* They are characterized by excessive fear of what is happening to them, confusion about their future, insecurity and instability present in the minds of adolescents.

- ❖ *Personality disorders.* In all the many disorders of this type, the way of perceiving oneself and others, the way of thinking and relating to others are very rigid and prevent adolescents from adapting to life situations.
- ❖ *Eating disorders.* They are characterized by abnormal behavior towards food and most often occur in females. In anorexia, girls are forced to stay or become weak and almost stop eating or vomiting. It can lead to extreme weight loss and life-threatening conditions. Bulimia, on the other hand, is characterized by excessive food consumption, with the frequent feeling of not being able to stop.
- ❖ *Psychosis.* These are very serious diseases, the best known of which is schizophrenia. Among the most important symptoms are delirium, which causes reality to be misinterpreted - for example, someone is convinced that a person walking behind them is following them (misinterpretation) - and hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that do not exist in reality).
- ❖ *Substance addiction* (drugs), smoking (marijuana), sex, dangerous and risky behaviors. Difficulties in adapting to adolescence, combined with the desire to seek new sensations and often to conform to the behavior of other members (especially older ones) of the group can lead to substance abuse (or mixtures of substances). of various nature and of various potency and toxicity (from nicotine to cannabis, from amphetamines to hallucinogens). These substances act on the brain and many cause changes in behavior and a state of addiction. The body gets used to them to the point where their absence creates severe discomfort and those who use them are constantly looking for the substance they depend on, which is administered in increasing doses and in the long term can create permanent damage and even cause the death.



## **2.2. Psychic and social changes**

In addition to hormonal changes and neurological development, changes also occur in psychosocial behaviors and emotions during adolescence due to attention, reasoning, memory and language skills (cognitive and intellectual skills). In fact, during the second decade of life, adolescents develop greater reasoning skills, follow logical and moral thinking, become able to think in an abstract way and make judgments. Most boys enter adolescence still perceiving the world around them in concrete terms: things are completely right or wrong, great or terrible. Children rarely project beyond the present, which explains the inability of some of them to be able to imagine the long-term consequences of their actions. At the end of adolescence, many young people learn to analyze situations in more detail, to formulate ideas, to project themselves into the future. They begin to build benchmarks to guide their actions. He tries to identify his own scale of values and his own sense of ethics. This path takes place through the meeting with other individuals, alternatives to parents, bearers of reference models from which to absorb "new material" useful for building the values that will guide their actions. New role models are friends, teachers, social workers, priests, sports coaches, masters of musical instruments, etc. Social affirmation is very important during adolescence. The adolescent learns to manage relationships with other children more effectively and begins to establish the first mature emotional relationships. A significant role is played by the school, which is one

of the most significant experiences that children have had in recent years. It is the place where they have the opportunity to learn and improve their knowledge. The choice of the type of school is indicative for the future life project that the adolescent-student intends to undertake and that will bring him closer to the world of adults.

### 2.3. What are risky behaviors



We talk about risky behaviors when a person voluntarily and repeatedly exposes himself to danger. This danger refers to the possibility of testing one's physical or mental integrity and even one's life. Those who adopt this behavior do not apply a valid reason to justify it. Adolescence is a stage that is particularly prone to risky behaviors. These include unprotected sex, extreme sports, peer challenges and various behaviors that endanger one's own safety, such as driving at exorbitant speeds or entering dangerous areas or communities.

- *Risky behaviors and adrenaline.* Adolescents often engage in risky behaviors claiming that they are experiences that produce the release of adrenaline. They consider that they experience intense emotions as positive, because this makes them feel more present in life. He almost considers it a symptom of "intense living". Although adolescence can be a difficult stage, in which exploration is an essential component, not all young people are driven by the same desire to explore extreme limits.

There are many reports that report the death of a teenager due to one of these risky behaviors. Drinking a bottle of tequila all at once, for example. Or when they throw themselves into a swimming pool jumping from above, or stealing their parents' car and causing serious accidents. Some even get involved in gangs or groups that live illegally and all to try experiences beyond limits.

- *The evolution of risky behaviors.* So far only a few decades, this desire has been channeled in other ways (risky behaviors are susceptible to trends). Moreover, according to anthropologist David Le Breton, these behaviors have been on the rise since the 1970s. In his opinion, drug addiction would be the first risk behavior that manifests itself in adolescents. Drugs began to be synonymous with young people in the 1960s and into the 1970s, which had already become common practice. Then a kind of anorexia epidemic spread, which took place in the last decades of the twentieth century. However, the first reports of adolescents engaging in risky behavior date back to the 1990s. Tattoos and piercings have also become a popular fashion for teenagers. In recent years, another wave of risky behavior has emerged. Challenges launched on social networks in which teenagers become victims of pedophiles, criminals, criminals or join extremist groups.



What happens to these young people? Le Breton indicates that the contemporary world has risky behaviors because there is widespread deinstitutionalization in society. The first of the declining institutions is the family. It is no longer a nucleus that places young people in a class, in values and that gives them limits. Something similar happens with other social institutions, such as the church, school, politics, etc. All these social agents are no longer a point of reference for the new generations. Through risky behaviors, many young people try to find those unknown limits, the boundaries of what is tolerable and what is not. When a teenager does not have reference points, his relationship with the world is built on very fragile foundations. A journey begins in search of the meaning of life, which often culminates in those dangerous explorations. Many children today grow up under the same roof as their parents, but light years away from them. It is not necessary to be constantly with them, but they must be present in their lives. And in many cases this is not the case.



Adolescence is an important phase of development to strengthen lifestyles and risk-related behaviors. Promoting healthy activities during this period is very important given the frequent possibility of risky behaviors that could have repercussions throughout life. The health consequences can be immediate, as in the case of dangerous driving, or delayed in time, as in the case of eating

disorders, risky sexual behaviors, tobacco smoking, drug use and alcohol abuse. The search for new and strong sensations reveals how much the teenager attracts the component related to challenge and self-experimentation. These behaviors have a meaning and a function. They allow the boy or girl to test their abilities, levels of autonomy and control achieved and to experiment with new styles of behavior. Taking risks and experimenting helps teenagers gain independence, maturity and build their own identity.

- *Internet - resource or danger.* Today's teenagers are often defined as the "multitasking generation", born and raised in a digital age that has introduced new forms of social relationships. Digitization is intense, not only at home but also at school, so technology complements or replaces traditional learning tools. International studies indicate how the use of technology can become problematic in a certain percentage of children, inducing a real dependence on the internet, games or social networks to the detriment of real life, school and relationship. This favors the risk of isolation at a time when the personality needs to be strengthened. The network, chats, blogs, communities, social networks are places frequented by many young people. New applications continue to appear, new groups, new ways of communication that are sometimes anonymous, have a high speed of dissemination, have the possibility to leave no traces and remain out of parental control, thus representing a fertile ground for adolescents who do not have a mental mechanism formed to defend oneself. The use of the network that is not mediated by competent adults can subject new generations to potential dangers, so it becomes necessary for those with responsibility for minors to acquire the appropriate skills and to be able to manage and prevent the risks that could arise in this way.

## 2.4. To influence and manage risky behavior



Given that risky behavior is directly associated with actions such as aggression, absence from school, risky sexual behavior, alcohol consumption, use of illegal substances (mainly marijuana), tobacco smoking, dangerous driving, illegal activities such as physical abuse or vandalism, and other relevant activities, risk behavior management should consider practical measures that will focus on risk reduction and may consider some of the following measures:

- *Help your teen assess risk* - It is clear that adolescent life has always been associated with taking risks. The rebellious spirit lives in the hearts and souls of all adolescents, at different levels, based on their personal, family, economic and social environments. Given this, give teenagers the opportunity to take a risk; however, help them assess the risk to avoid problems that may arise as a result of each given situation.

- *Develop some agreed basic rules* - Make sure you establish some common rules that will be binding on both parties and consider the needs of each party. This requires flexibility and respect for privacy, which will eliminate conflicts.

- *Discuss values* - The more you talk to your teens about social and family values, such as respect, dignity, etc., the better the results will be for effective communication.

- *Follow the teenager* - It is important to give the relevant space to the teenagers, depending on the needs of each stage; however, discreet surveillance will lead to benefits such as ensuring a certain level of freedom but also ensuring discreet control.

- *Encourage social activities* - Such as volunteering for example, which can lead to some great benefits that can be transferred to the rest of the activities and can promote teamwork

## Exercise 6



**Talk to your teen about what risk means.** It is important to understand what it means and how to manage it.

- Sit on the couch with a classmate as you would with your teenager. The colleague will play the role of the teenager.
- He will talk about risky behaviors
- Listen and explain with the right tone and gestures what they should do to avoid this kind of behavior

## 2.5. Common signs of risky behaviors

As a result of the problems mentioned above, the following signs are assessed as the most common in terms of risky behaviors:

- *Sex, alcohol and drugs* - Teens can start abusing sex, alcohol and even drugs, before reaching legal age, which can cause serious health and legal problems for both them and their families. Especially for drugs, given that in most countries, most drugs are illegal, this can be identified as a real challenge to provide relevant assistance before things get out of hand. The solution in this case for parents is not to panic, to remain calm and to focus in order to develop the relevant communication channels.

- *Increased use of communication devices and social networks* - An increasing number of teenagers around the world are using smartphones and social networks to a worrying level, which, according to several researchers, can have an impact negative on the mental health of adolescents, and the development of aggressive behaviors. In addition, this can lead to social exclusion, which leads to additional problems and can have a negative impact on their general life. Attitudes and lifestyles are in danger and this must be protected, as it can become a really harmful factor and can have an extremely serious impact on their mental health. The solution in this case, as far as parents are concerned, is not to try to completely ban teenagers from using their smartphones, or even worse, to deprive them of them, because this will only lead to a useless hostile environment that will ruin any possibilities for fruitful communication. Instead, parents should try to monitor internet use, apply internet filtering that can "separate wheat from chaff" and allow access only to secure internet sources. Talking to teenagers will help them understand that this is only for their own personal protection. In addition, parents and teenagers may agree on certain hours of use. It concludes that many parents worry that their children spend too much time in front of screens, that YouTube was the most used social networking app among teens in

2019, followed by Instagram and Snapchat, that TikTok became the app with the most rapid growth for adolescents

- *Mood Swings* - This refers to a really worrying situation and refers to changing the mood of teenagers, from extremely happy and extroverted, can change quickly and become introverted. Depression can sometimes occur as a result of school failure or love, and this can lead them to become introverts. In such situations, the solution is related to the need to avoid trivializing what happens to teenagers, because this can create more obstacles, due to the fact that they will feel that it does not matter and that they are not important. The main tips for this type of situation are those that show parents to establish better communication, focus on ensuring empathy and listen to what teenagers have to say about the reasons that cause them to experience such serious fluctuations in their feelings. In addition, if the parents consider that they cannot cope with the situation, they should seek specialist assistance.

- *Aggression* - Adolescents can develop aggressive behavior for several reasons that are incomprehensible, making it difficult for parents to develop an overview and a clear understanding not only of the problems but also of the causes that lead to these situations. It is important for parents to understand that anger is a common human feeling and is even more common among adolescents, asking them to show the relevant understanding towards their adolescents. It is important for parents to identify the best possible solutions that allow them to remain calm, to identify ways to transfer this positive feeling to their adolescents and to allow them to become more self-confident. The role of health professionals is essential in this situation, as they can provide relevant assistance to help adolescents and their families avoid such situations. One of the most common mistakes parents make when dealing with this situation is that they also develop the same aggressive behavior, believing that this will cause teenagers to understand what they want to say. However, this is a false approach, it creates more obstacles.

Therefore, encouraging adolescents to speak and express their feelings is the best possible solution to problems.

- *False or hidden facts* - It is not uncommon for parents to learn that their teenagers have lied to them about important issues related to their personal lives and also about crucial illegal issues and can put parents in difficult and awkward situations. This can be devastating for parents; however, it is understandable that teenagers fear that they may be punished for various things they have done. As a result, lies become a real obstacle and difficult for parents to overcome.

### III. COMMUNICATION WITH THE ADOLESCENT

#### 3.1. How you can help your teenagers



Adolescence is considered a very stressful stage for parents, due to sudden mood swings in response to the profound transformation that takes place in young people. Physical, emotional, psychological and even social transformations, which begin around the age of 10-11, influence the development of young people and especially influence communication with parents. Most parents fear that they will not be able to manage the emotional instability of their teenagers and consider this stage as one of the most stressful. However, it can be a fascinating process for both of you, especially if you have the tools to deal with and understand all the manifestations of adolescence, such as mood swings. It is important, dear parents, to know that adolescence is that phase of human life in which the process of physical, mental and sexual maturation begins. These changes generate a new vision of the environment, both family and social, and consequently cause mood swings. The changes usually cause amazement, anxiety, fear or suffering in young people. However, this process is easier if

teenagers and parents learn everything they need to know about the challenges to be experienced. In this regard, below we share some observations that can be very useful in this delicate phase. There are physical changes that I mentioned above. At this stage, self-awareness, sexual attraction and even sexual arousal increase. For this reason, physical appearance and self-image are issues that are beginning to become very important. These are issues that cause more concern than others in young people, but can be addressed by accepting the changes and even adapting to them. Adolescents strive to reconcile the inner and outer world and find their own identity. Also, the search for freedom is a constant during adolescence, they reflect their inner chaos and spend several hours in bed. This is due to a greater physiological need for rest due to high energy consumption and hormonal aspects.

Dear parents, in order to develop an effective relationship with your teenagers, it is necessary to know some techniques that can help you in this regard. As a result, an effective relationship with your teenager requires effective communication. Below are some important steps to take in this regard.



**Communication** is the process that allows people to let others know their thoughts, emotions and share experiences, establishing a relationship through dialogue. Communication always has a verbal component (content that is

expressed in words) and a non-verbal component (facial expression, body posture, tone of voice). These two dimensions are sometimes expressed in the same direction, while in other cases they express opposite feelings and thoughts, making the interlocutor feel uncomfortable. However, it often happens that parents try to convey their ideas to their children, the result of years of personal experience, which they consider appropriate, without being willing to listen to their teenager's speech, the reasons that push them in certain directions or their needs. It is good to know, dear parents, that the solutions that have worked in the past are not always the best in the present; teenagers have their own history, are different people from their parents and must be able to experience the consequences of their actions to grow up and become independent. Thomas Gordon, a psychologist who has been heavily involved in communication, has carefully studied the factors that can facilitate or block it and has developed a model known as the Gordon Method, which provides interesting information on how to create and maintain effective relationships. in resolving conflicts between parents and children.



## Exercise 7



**Communicate with your teen.** It is important to listen, let him finish what he has to say, give him feedback and wait for feedback.

- Sit on the couch with a classmate as you would with your teenager. The colleague will play the role of the teenager.
- Listen to what your colleague tells you
- Give feedback
- Have your say without criticizing
- Ask for feedback



### 3.2. The 12 attitudes

Gordon identified 12 attitudes that characterize inefficient communication between adolescents and parents and should therefore be limited:



- ✚ *Giving orders, asking, ordering:* "You have to ...", "Don't say you're not capable anymore and get to work!" When you, dear parents, address the adolescent in this way, you often do not take into account his feelings and risk proposing behavioral patterns that are inappropriate for his age. The command often generates hostility and anger, makes the adolescent feel inferior to the adult, conveys the idea that the needs of the parent are more important than those of the child.
- ✚ *Warnings, threats:* "It's better for you ... otherwise ...", "Go to the office and study if you don't want to take 4 more in math!" When the adolescent feels threatened, he can react in two opposite ways: the counterattack for the simple pleasure of opposing what he perceives as an imposition or submission for fear of losing a reference he feels he still needs. In both cases, the desire to approach the problem constructively fades, and the adolescent loses confidence in the possibility of establishing a good relationship with the adult.

- ✚ *Preaching*: "You should not behave like this ...", "It is your duty to help around the house, to do work even for yourself!" The invitation to behave in a certain way by imposing a moral can generate feelings of guilt in the adolescent and may reduce his self-confidence and abilities. Explicitly telling him what to do, the parent tells the child, without knowing it, that he does not believe in his ability to cope with the situation alone.
- ✚ *Offering solutions that you would approach as parents*: "If I were you I would do ...", "Don't be too upset, do as I do, when I have a worm in my head I go for a walk and I'm already feel better "The solutions already packaged by the adult prevent the adolescent from reflecting carefully on their problem, thinking about different possible solutions and experiencing them directly. Too much advice hinders the development of autonomy and can make adolescents insecure and more dependent on adults. .
- ✚ *Conviction with logic*: "Here it is ...", "You have to be objective. You only have one month before the exams and if you do not ask me to listen to you, you will not be able to recover and you will not take the exams "This method of communication can it offends the teenager, it can make him feel humiliated, it can make him withdraw into himself. The adolescent perceives that his opinions are more important to the parent than his feelings. Sometimes, in front of the adults' arguments, the adolescent reacts with counter-arguments and neither of the two, parent and child, manages to put himself in the other's place and understand his point of view.
- ✚ *Guilt, judgment, criticism*: "You don't want to do anything ... you're lazy" Criticism and judgments often end up affecting a teenager's self-image. Some children come to accept their parents' accusations as true ("I'm not good", "I don't deserve anything"), while others will develop an inferiority complex and in adult life will seek to prove their superiority. ("Look who's talking! What have they managed to do in their lives ...").

- ✚ *Exaggerated thanks and compliments:* "As always, I agree with you ...", "Everything you do is good!" Undeserved appreciations can hurt teenagers because they perceive them as false, far from the image they have of themselves.
- ✚ *Labeling, humiliation, using clichés:* "You are a clumsy", "Young people are all lazy", "Those of your generation do not know what they want" All messages that ridicule or humiliate the teenager are offensive and cause him to shut up.
- ✚ *Interpretation, diagnosis:* "In reality you don't really believe what you said ...", "By behaving like this you want to make me pay". It is not at all useful to analyze the adolescent's behavior and communicate to them the idea you have about him or his intentions. If the parent's interpretation is correct, the teenager will tend to defend himself, but if it is wrong he will feel even more misunderstood.
- ✚ *Minimize, consolation:* "Don't worry, it will pass soon", "You'll see, tomorrow you won't think about it" When teenagers are sad, angry, parents often try to distract them, to talk about other subjects than those that constitute the problem or tend to deny the real importance of the problem underestimating the weight of their mood. This attitude also makes them feel less listened to.
- ✚ *Questions, investigations:* "How do you do that ...", "I can know why ..." If the teenager feels interrogated and perceives the adult as too intrusive, he will tend to close the communication and say nothing more about yourself.
- ✚ *Changing the subject:* "Think about this, let's talk about something else now!" When the parent tries to be wise or to avoid the problem, the adolescent tends to believe that the adult does not give due importance to the issues that concern him and does not take into account his feelings.

In discussions with teenagers, phrases like the ones mentioned above appear quite frequently. These are not extremely harmful attitudes, but methods of communication that do not help to improve communication and which, in most cases, make it more complicated than it already is.

## Exercise 8



### **Five-step dialogue.**

- Sit on the couch with a classmate as you would with your teenager. The colleague will play the role of the teenager.
  - ❖ Five-step dialogue
- Understand the motivation of your teen's request
- Show him you understand
- Assessing the situation by expressing one's own opinion and asking for the adolescent's opinion
- Agreement on the solution
- Final decision

### 3.3. Here's what you can do to help your teen feel listened to and protected



- ❖ *Listen more.* With teenagers, it is much more appropriate to spend twice as much time listening than talking. Find time to spend time with your child. Teenagers are often busy with school, friends, have other interests, but you can always find the right times to converse with them (during breakfast and dinner; offer to accompany them to the places they attend and take the opportunity to try to talk, this will expand the opportunities to communicate.)
- ❖ *Give them the right privacy.* Teenagers need their own space, so it is more appropriate, for example, to beat before entering their room and generally respect it as you would with an adult.
- ❖ *Try to be aware of their main interests.* Listen to their music, find out about the TV shows they watch. This way you will continue to play an active role in their lives.

- ❖ *Be a loving parent.* Adolescence is a time when young people often struggle with the experiences they live and the need to feel loved on the one hand and to demonstrate their autonomy on the other. In any case, do not miss the opportunity to show them love and affection, to celebrate their successes, forgive their mistakes, listen to them when they have a problem and show interest in how they intend to solve it.
- ❖ *Space for fun.* Find time to share leisure time with them or to talk about pleasant topics. Good feelings help build a good relationship!



### 3.4. How does a negative communication turn into a positive one?



- ❖ Select carefully what you really need to discuss. A very important topic is safety, for example, not getting into a car with a driver who drank alcohol;
- ❖ Criticize constructively, always offering suggestions for improvement.
- ❖ Recognize and appreciate their achievements.
- ❖ Try to be a good role model, for example, apologizing when you are wrong.
- ❖ Try to allow more freedom when you show responsible behavior. In this way, the adolescent will understand that every right must be won, but that, with it, comes a greater responsibility.
- ❖ Make reasonable rules. Try to give your consent for less important issues. Stop and think before you say no to a request.

### 3.5. Educational styles

Here are some educational styles that allow you to successfully overcome the challenges that may arise from interacting with your teen.



- ❖ *Show love.* A very special connection can be established if parents can become loving figures who show a real concern for the well-being of adolescents. By their example, children learn to care for and love others. Remember that despite indifference, harshness, or criticism of parents or teachers, young people need love, understanding, and patience. In an environment like this it will be easier to deal with their mood swings.
- ❖ *Provide assistance.* It is very important for teenagers to feel that they can count on their parents, who must also value their efforts and successes. Young people need to strengthen their identity, and parents have a duty to encourage them to have self-confidence in order to achieve their goals.
- ❖ *Set limits.* Establishing rules is essential for young people to feel safe. In addition, they are an excellent tool for structuring their lives. However, you

must be careful not to become authoritarian parents who impose inflexible rules or, on the other hand, be too lenient or permissive. You need to be balanced and set clear boundaries with clear explanations.

- ❖ *Give them a good example.* As already mentioned, during adolescence children's reasoning ability is diminished. Try to be consistent with your actions and what you want them to convey. Remember, you are the first point of reference in the search for their identity.
- ❖ *Show them respect.* Everyone deserves respect, but sometimes we forget that the same is true for children and especially teenagers and that they should be treated with respect. For this reason, it is important to recognize their autonomy even if their tastes do not match yours. Try to be understanding with their views, feelings and needs.

Adolescent mood swings as well as physical, mental and emotional transformations present a great challenge for children and parents. But if you can establish a healthy relationship with your children from childhood, based on love, understanding and respect, adolescence will be a simpler and more rewarding process.



## Exercise 9



**Efficient communication.** Communicating effectively means adapting to your teen.

- Sit on the couch with a classmate as you would with your teenager. The colleague will play the role of the teenager.
- The colleague will tell you something
- Ask your classmate to warn you when you frown, when you respond in an inappropriate tone, when you talk about him, when you don't let him finish what he has to say.
- Practice until you do none of this



### 3.6. Self-esteem

Self-esteem is a real challenge for most people and, of course, this is true for teenagers as well. Early development of self-esteem can determine the identity of the adolescent and, as a result, due attention must be paid to avoid possible mistakes that will lead to negative results and long-term consequences. Self-esteem refers to the general feeling of a person's self-worth or personal worth. In other words, how much the person is appreciated and how much they like it. Self-esteem in adolescence is a challenging aspect and generally refers to the most important experiences and feelings that young people have encountered, creating either a positive or a negative environment, as elements that influence identity and relationships. their. This will provide the opportunity for a better understanding of each given situation; therefore, applying the best possible strategies that will help parents achieve the expected results. As for teenage girls, they are usually in a more vulnerable situation and have lower self-esteem than boys. Their physical appearance is a real challenge and can be a determining factor that leads to a low level of self-esteem. If this is combined with other problems in the school and family environment, it can lead to some serious negative situations, which creates additional challenges for parents. For boys, things are different; however, the challenges remain the same. Boys usually struggle to conform to social stereotypes and this creates serious pressure. They must demonstrate their masculinity which can become a negative determining factor that can lead to a low level of self-esteem.

To help you identify possible problems in shaping a balanced self-esteem, it is important to identify the reasons and also the signs, especially in the early stages, which cause the adolescent to feel in a particular way, found in the table. lower.

**Table 1. Adolescence High level and low level of self-esteem.**

Source: McKnight (2019)

High level	Low level
They feel loved and accepted by those around them	They are perceived as inferior to others, disrespected and underestimated
They tend to be optimistic about their future	They feel insecure and have a crippling fear of failure
Able to take responsibility for their own behavior and decisions	They often lack the discipline, commitment and ability to take on responsibility
they know their strengths and weaknesses, they accept criticism, they can self-criticize and deal with problems.	I don't accept criticism, I take it personally
They have emotional stability and show empathy	They blame others and have an aggressive, violent, regressive attitude
They are sensitive to the needs of others	Communicates very hard



### 3.7. Rules for balancing self-esteem

Here are some rules that your teen should follow to balance their self-esteem

- **Be tolerant of yourself** - Try to avoid all negative and unnecessary thoughts that can create obstacles
- **You know who you are** - Stop comparing yourself to others and focus on your own goals, avoiding wasting time
- **Get moving** - Exercise can have an impact and become a serious motivation
- **No one is perfect** - You need to understand that all people can fail with some of their tasks
- **Remember that everyone makes mistakes** - Mistakes help you improve, so see the positive side of things
- **Focus on what you can change** - Invest your time in things that can be changed and focus on this
- **Surround yourself with a support team** - This will help you develop positive feelings



## Exercise 10



**Self-esteem.** How to improve::

- Sit on the couch with a classmate as you would with your teenager. The colleague will play the role of the teenager.
  - ❖ Tell your colleague the following:
- You know who you are. Don't let others influence you negatively
- Everyone makes mistakes. Don't blame yourself for that, but think about how you won't repeat them
- Take any failure as an experience.



### 3.8. Developing effective communication with the adolescent

Here are some elements of a strategy to apply to your dear parents, in order to develop an effective communication with the teenager.



- Encourage empathy
- Emphasize the immediate and long-term consequences of their actions
- Try to match your teenager's language level with your level of understanding.
- Help your teen develop their decision-making and problem-solving skills
- Stay connected and involved in your teen's life
- Establish a solid procedure for communicating with adolescents, based on their unique needs
  - Encourage teens to become more active and develop new and fruitful activities
  - Develop group sessions, if necessary, to ensure that teenagers do not feel socially excluded
  - Work closely with adolescents to identify ways to manage difficult situations

- Provide a consistent, loving environment with consistency
- Set boundaries, restrictions and rewards to ensure that a fair environment is built
- Make sure you spend time with teens to develop communication and trust



### 3.9. How can you understand if your teen can have problems



Here are some features that can help you understand if problematic behaviors are occurring in your teen's life, in which case you need to intervene.

**Table 2. Normal adolescent behavior and adolescent behavior that causes concern**

<b>Normal behavior for teenagers</b>	<b>Behavior for teens that causes concern "</b>
He wants to spend more time with colleagues and less time with family	He does not want to spend time with family or friends, avoiding any social activity
He is reluctant to wake up early for school	Absolute refusal to go to school - especially if this behavior happens suddenly

The need for longer sleep or the development of a greater appetite during growth	Sudden changes in energy levels, ie sleeping abnormally or not being able to sleep at all
Sadness and anxiety after conflicts with friends or a breakup with a boy / girl	Sadness and anxiety that do not correct or do not decrease in intensity after a few days to a few weeks.
Some easy risks or experimenting with sex, alcohol, drugs	Extremely risky and / or delinquent behavior, including non-compliance with internal rules required by parents or company laws
Relying on a loved pet for comfort instead of a parent or friend	Deliberate injury to pets or torture or killing of any animal
Concern about physical appearance	Sudden and significant changes in eating behaviors

Source: Georgetown Behavioral Health Institute (2015)



### 3.10. How to create a positive environment

- ❖ Honesty that must be shown from the earliest stages of adolescents' lives; therefore, it must become an internal family culture
- ❖ Have a communication channel open permanently and for all possible problems and make sure that they will share the concerns of teenagers
- ❖ Tell the truth about all the problems and don't try to hide things, even if you can consider them things that are not relevant to teenagers and that hiding will protect them

All of the above are just some of the signs and solutions that parents need to look for to ensure the well-being and protection of their teens. All of these are really essential and can give parents the ability to create a more sophisticated approach and establish the best possible communication channels that are considered essential. Despite the fact that the behaviors identified above are considered to be the most common, there are also a few that are considered just as important:

- Defiance of rules and argumentation (usually teenagers do not assess dangers)
- Drastic changes in appearance, because they want to fit the rest of the "gang"
- Poor communication because they feel that others are not paying attention to their opinions



### 3.11. Emotions in adolescence

Also, some emotions are experienced by teenagers in a damaged, exaggerated form. The most important of these are:

- Euphoric joy, because they want to feel comfortable and create a positive environment that will help them overcome difficult situations, so they greatly exaggerate this emotion. Smile, body language, such as a relaxed position, and tone of voice, a pleasant way of speaking optimistically, are the most common characteristics of joy.
- Sadness is the opposite type of joy and can be characterized as a transient emotional state for feelings such as disappointment, pain, hopelessness, disinterest. It is important that in such situations when they express sadness they are focused on negative thoughts. In addition, they tend to avoid other people in the family and in the school environment.
- Fear is considered to be the most important compared to the previous two. In addition, this is a key emotion for young people and can affect their personality and ability to develop their school performance. In addition, in cases of fear in the family environment, this can become a serious obstacle and can lead to an environment of internal challenge. Some of the most common features and expressions of fear relate to facial expressions, such as widening of the eyes; body language shows that he is trying to hide from the threat. Physiological reactions such as rapid breathing and heartbeat occur.
- Disgust refers to a strong feeling of disapproval and antipathy towards a situation or behavior of a person, etc.
- Anger is one of the most common emotions of teenagers, because they are in a vulnerable situation and face difficult and quite unpleasant situations in their daily lives, such as:

- ♣ Family environment, which can create some challenges serious due to different opinions that can become really detrimental to the ability to establish one's personality.
- ♣ The school environment where they also feel misunderstood and may be isolated.
- Surprise is the sixth major emotion and can be:
  - ♣ Positive that is associated with a pleasant state;
  - ♣ Negative, which is associated with a negative state and can lead to situations such as misunderstanding, conflict, poor communication with close friends and family and even a hostile environment that can diminish young people's enthusiasm for life;
  - ♣ Neutral, which can potentially include surprise, amazement, boredom.
- Love is the seventh and last emotion and can be considered the strongest of all. Adolescent love is expressed in many different ways, such as body language, facial expressions, and actions. This can vary depending on each person's personality. There are several situations in which emotion and the feeling of love can have different aspects:
  - ♣ Romantic love, which includes attachment, care and intimacy in which adolescents express their love for the person they feel closest to and this can be a real asset due to the authenticity of adolescents' feelings and their need to love and be loved.
  - ♣ Love Sex Drive, which is a natural feeling for all people and of course this is more evident among young people, due to hormones that create a real hormonal storm in adolescents, creating a situation that can be associated with love and which is present for a shorter period.

- Contempt - is a negative emotion in which the perception prevails that individuals are worthless and are not able to do the right things. Such emotion in adolescents can create a feeling of isolation and inability to achieve their goals, which can lead to low performance in the school environment.
- Satisfaction - This is a state of emotional satisfaction once an individual has achieved their goals and this can lead to better relationships.
- Embarrassment - An emotion commonly encountered in adolescents, which predominates in situations where an individual faces difficult and unexpected situations. In addition, embarrassment can be seen as a real challenge for young people, as they may not have the experience and calm to deal with such situations.
- Guilt - can lead to low levels of self-esteem in adolescents and can create serious obstacles for young people, as they can carry this emotional state for the rest of their lives
- Pride - A positive emotion because it treats the inner satisfaction of achieving goals, and this can be seen as an intrinsic motivation. For teens, this is vital to improving their personality and achieving their future goals.
- Satisfaction - Another positive emotion that can be seen in a long time to achieve goals, ensuring good relationships with others, behavior to cope with the general difficulties of life.
- Shame - For teenagers, shame can be seen as a catastrophic situation that they are able to exaggerate in an unrealistic way.

### 3.12. A good communication with your teenager



- *Listen more than you talk* - let teenagers express themselves and, most importantly, provide them with all possible incentives to do so. This can create a positive environment that can be extended to further activities. Adolescents need and seek to express their own opinions and concerns, as they face many challenges.

- *Make time to spend together* - Communication is generally based on sharing and spending time together. One of the major challenges that both teenagers and parents face is that they do not have enough quality time to spend together. Lack of time creates an additional distance between parents and adolescents and can lead to loss of confidence, misunderstanding and misinterpretation of many problems.

- *Provide privacy* - teens, now more than ever, have strong personalities with access to a wealth of information. The development of personal relationships between adolescents, at all levels, including, of course, sexual intercourse, requires adolescents to have their own space. Confidentiality is a major challenge for parents, as well as a major demand from teenagers.

- *Keep up with their interests* - A great way to understand teens and show them that you really are a part of their lives is to pay attention to their interests. Listening to them! For example, music, even if it doesn't fit your preferences, watching movies according to teenagers' preferences, etc., shows them that parents are ready to get involved and be an active part of their lives. This can also be an indirect way to ensure that your teens are not involved in harmful activities.

- *Be a loving parent* - During difficult times, both in school and in personal life, parents need to show that they really care, be affectionate with teens when it comes to personal emotions, and be supportive when it comes to there is a school failure. Adolescents need to see their parents celebrate their achievements, support them in their failures, and forgive them for their mistakes. Such actions will help them become more mature, learn from their mistakes and deal with problems more effectively. This will make them even more tolerant when their parents criticize them, because they will understand that it is a win-win situation for both sides, and criticism is part of the game.

- *Have fun* - Teenagers go through this stage only once and should enjoy it as much as possible. It is important to make time and get involved in activities that give them pleasure and fun. This can have a substantial level of positive impact on both your teenagers and you as a parent. Recent research has clearly shown that "Fun" can positively influence adolescents and improve their psychological state. Adolescents who have fun with their parents are more likely to overcome personal problems and improve their overall performance. It seems that the emphasis on fun while striking a balance between fitness, psychological well-being and lifelong lessons for a healthy and active lifestyle are key to success.

- *Don't get too emotional*. You shouldn't take it personally when teenagers show a negative approach.

- *Ask honest questions that allow teens to give honest answers.* Thus, teenagers develop a higher level of confidence, which is essential to get closer to you.

- *Avoid showing that you need, or even worse, are desperate to befriend your teens.*

- *Positive communication is greatly affected when decisions are made in a situation of conflict or quarrel.* Therefore, to make sure that positive communication is established, avoid making decisions when you are not calm, both you and the teenager you are communicating with.

- *Ask curious questions that reflect the current situation affecting young people.* This can create a positive environment and a higher level of trust among teenagers, as they will understand that their parents want to know about the problems they have.

- *Focus on creating a sense of “Teamwork” within the family.* This will help teenagers to focus on getting the best possible common outcomes, and it will also help them avoid possible selfish attitudes that pose a serious threat to effective communication.

- *Make sure you understand the transition of teens from one stage of adolescence to another.*

- *Show understanding* when it comes to the concept of sex, which is a serious challenge for teenagers. The issue of sex communication is affected by several parameters, such as, what was talked to the teenagers about this topic, how the parents expressed themselves, how often they approached the topic, how much the teenagers feel understood by their parents. .

- *It is very important to have a consensus in family communication.* Both parents need to communicate the same rules, expectations, opinions about what you want from your teenager. This requires the cooperation of both parents and can help to adapt their approach to communication based on the specific needs and desires of the adolescent.

- *Give praise to actions you consider positive.* This stimulates the actions and positive behavior of the adolescent.

- *Encourage teenagers* when, despite their best efforts, things did not go as expected, telling them that they should see this as an opportunity to try harder, to focus on their goals and that what it happened can be seen as a lesson.

- Another important way that can develop effective communication between parents and adolescents is the *ability to do things together*, such as going to sporting events, even if the parents are not true fans of the sport. This will give you the opportunity to spend quality time together and create a better environment

- *Avoid giving teens unsolicited instructions or advice*, which can lead to controversy. Avoiding such actions and providing fruitful advice can develop better communication as well as ensure trust between the two parties, especially in difficult family times.

- *Talk about behaviors and not personal traits.* That is, "what you did was not exactly right" and not "You are a fool, you are not capable of anything."

- *You can improve communication by listening, speaking, understanding*, but most importantly, you need to know when to stop talking.

- *Hug your teenager every day and tell them that you love and respect him.* This assurance can become a positive sign and can create the relevant background for future actions

- *Use relevant body language*, which is essential for the development of effective communication, do not sit with your arms crossed on your chest, look into the eyes of the teenager when talking to him, he will feel more comfortable.

- *Ensure regular communication in the school environment* - The special activity is considered to be of critical importance for the overall improvement of adolescents in the school environment, as they will understand that they are under supervision. Of course, this should not be used as a "control tool", but should instead be applied as a tool to show the relevant understanding of overall performance and provide relevant support when and if needed. In addition, the

involvement of the school in the general communication procedure, as a "moderator" between parents and adolescents, can be seen and evaluated as a tool that will lead the two parties to a better understanding, increase their performance, more quality time. together.



### 3.13. Application of the 7 Cs in communication

It is another important practical recommendation that can lead to relevant positive results between parents and adolescents

♣ **Completeness** - The message to be passed from one person to another must be complete to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations that can lead to unnecessary conflicts.

♣ **Concrete** - Concrete interpersonal communication is also about a clear message and refers to the use of words and actions that provide a solid understanding. This practical advice is considered essential in the communication procedure, because it applies a realistic approach and leaves nothing to the imagination of the two parties.

♣ **Courtesy** - This demonstrates politeness in one's attitude and behavior towards others.

♣ **Correctness** - The correct use of the appropriate sentences that must be chosen carefully to adapt to the needs and requirements of each situation.

♣ **Clarity** - The issue of Clarity is a real challenge for parents, as they need to develop the need to use clear language to help teenagers, to get closer to their parents and their family. In addition, clarity of words will not leave room for misunderstandings, especially when considering important issues where appropriate wording can become a catalyst for communication.

♣ **Consideration** - consideration, not only can be considered a practical tool, but most importantly, can positively affect the personality development of adolescents, leading to the relevant positive impact in their personal lives

♣ **Conciseness** - the final part of this procedure requires parents to be consistent in their approach, as this can give them the ability to become more efficient.

### Also address your teenagers

- *Specific* - Focus on the problems of each situation and approach the situation in a unique way to become more efficient in terms of time and results
- *Realistic* - When things get very difficult develop realistic and achievable strategies that really lead to solving the problem



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