

5 And A Half Steps On the Inevitable Journey From Childhood To Adulthood

If we are to understand teenagers then it will be good for us to understand some of the journey that they take from childhood to adulthood - the journey of adolescence. I don't intend this article to become a theoretical thesis on the journey but rather an overview of the types of issues young people face and some of the implications. My whole reason for writing this is to help people, help you, and find a better way and how that impacts your relationships with others - particularly young people. If adolescence is anything it is a process of change. Someone has said that change is inevitable except from a vending machine! And of course young people are not machines but rather changing people in a changing world.

Let's look at 5 and a half area that change over this time.

1. Physically [the half is a subset of this - puberty]

Rapid physical growth leaves young people tired and always hungry, often clumsy and irritable too. They are constantly needing to eat [toast always worked well for us - cheap and they could often cook it for themselves] and it is good to remember that this is a physical need that they have and not a source of irritation for you. The reason for the clumsiness is that their brain has yet to adjust to the longer arms and legs - so for example they might go to pick up a glass and their brain has calculated the space between BUT has not yet adjusted for the extra growth so their fingers reach their glass and keep going. A spill, [I confess that I am still unsure why it always happens with blackcurrant juice!] The wrong thing to say at this time is you clumsy oaf as they too are embarrassed and unsure of why this has begun to happen.

1.5 Puberty

Parts of the physical changes include puberty. This is one of the potentially most embarrassing phases for a young person to go through - and remember they have never experienced anything like it before. It is embarrassing for the early developers and for the late developers. Please do not make any references without their permission or their initiating a conversation although, if possible, it is good to talk about these things before they happen so they are not surprised by their bodily changes. Remember that all the old wives tales, and sometimes some real facts will be caught in the school yard so be prepared to correct any misunderstanding.

It isn't my intention here to detail the different aspects of puberty more to highlight the difficult time of transition and to encourage you to offer support in any way that you can.

2. Mental

During the teenage years young people move from thinking in concrete terms to more abstract, become more curious, begin to have fantasies and display the trend towards a quick turnover of ideas. They can display an intellectual stubbornness, which can be exasperating and be argumentative just for the sake of argument. Teenagers seem to have a very short attention span and will adopt short lived enthusiasms - for example they want to change the world but cant be bothered to get up in the morning!

3. Social

This is the time when they move from primary education to high school and with that comes a change in their social scene. Prior to this point all of their friends were also neighbors but now they can expand and choose friends with the same interests - music, sport or whatever. There also seems to be a perverse law in action where their friends are now taken from the furthest geographical point of the school catchment area - welcome to the age of the taxi ! It is also the age of peer pressure and the requirement to be accepted socially hits a peak with the fear of rejection becoming acute in many young peoples lives. A time of essential encouragement as they move towards independence. Also this is the time when the opposite sex transform from people of ridicule to people that are desired and the consequent need to behave properly, look good, smell nice wear the right clothes and avoid all forms of embarrassment. Self worth and self esteem are formulated at this time and young people are extremely sensitive to comments from significant adults - not a time to crack jokes at their expense.

4. Emotional.

If you can picture a roller coaster then you can picture the emotional life of many young people during this time of transition. The ability to be totally in love and totally out of love with the same person in the space of a few days is a hallmark of adolescence. Of course hormonal changes are causing many of these fluctuating emotions but you can be sure that they do not have a clue as to what is happening or what to do about it. They can giggle and sob within the space of minutes and be unsure as to why they have done either. Someone has said that every adolescent believes they are the first adolescent in history, so we need to show them we accept them and understand some of what they are facing.

Adolescents have not yet achieved a settled identity and part of the emotional change is to establish their identity. Pressure on all sides to be this or that creates confusion, inconsistency, discouragement and even anger.

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7. Spiritual

Many teenagers will be searching for something which they consider works, this is true also of faith and spirituality. If they have been brought up in a believing family then they will begin to question their parents belief systems. Not in the sense of rejecting them but rather adopting them for their own as opposed to the faith being passed on from earlier generations. For those without any faith background, these young people begin the search for the answers to the questions of life - why are we here where did we come from etc.

Incidentally this is also when young people consider the issues of environment, vegetarianism, politics, justice, social action, abortion and many other moral concerns. It is part of their growing up - not to be avoided but encourage and stimulated.



About Nigel

Nigel has been paid to work with young people since 1991 and did it voluntarily before then. He actually believes he hasn't been to work since then because he enjoys himself so much. He is available for private consultation and coaching as well as having resources available e.g. **Understanding Teenagers A-Z**.

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