



ASD and Adolescence Part Two - Physical Changes and Lifestyle Choices

This article is the second of a series of eight articles about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and adolescence. The articles are designed to be a guide for parents of children with ASD; they will provide information about adolescence, the extra challenges that may arise for children with ASD during this time, and techniques for teaching your child about adolescence and dealing with the challenges.

The eight articles are:

1. Introduction
2. Physical changes and lifestyle choices
3. Teaching public and private and appropriate sexual language
4. Emotional and social changes
5. Peer pressure, bullying, drugs and alcohol
6. Sexuality
7. Unwanted sexual attention and sexual abuse
8. Techniques and advice for parents

Physical changes

For most children, the physical changes of puberty usually start between the ages of nine and 16. Girls usually begin to change a bit earlier than boys, at about 10 or 11 years of age. Boys usually begin to change between the ages of 12 or 13.

Physical changes that can be expected include the following:

Both Sexes
Growth spurt - height and weight
Clumsiness
Change in face shape
Deepening of voice (more evident in boys)
Pubic & underarm hair
Increased skin oiliness
Body odor
Moodiness
Sexual feelings
Changes in feelings about friends & family

Boys Only
Facial & body hair
Development of muscles
Shoulders & chest broaden
Penis & testicle size increases
Spontaneous erections
Semen & sperm production
Wet dreams



Girls Only
Breasts
Hips wider
Sometimes light facial hair
Small increase in leg hair
Thighs larger
Periods

Lifestyle choices

Lifestyle choices begin to become important during puberty. While previously their parents or caregiver had been responsible for keeping them healthy, at puberty it becomes the individual's job to make lifestyle choices and to learn to take care of themselves to stay healthy. They need to become responsible for general hygiene such as showering daily, wearing deodorant, brushing teeth, washing hair, coping with acne and cutting nails.

Decisions need to be made about what to wear, what to eat, how much to sleep, whether to shave (beard/legs), whether to wear make up, whether to exercise, and whether to get tattoos or body piercings. While many of these decisions need to be jointly made with the input of both the child and the parent, a same age and sex mentor may be useful to offer advice on current trends, and what the other kids are doing at what age.

References and Recommended Reading

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