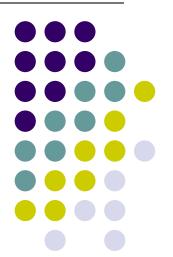
# Coping With Puberty in Early Adolescent Boys

By

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### What is Puberty?



 Berk (1996) states that puberty is a "flood of biological events leading to an adult-sized body and sexual maturity". There is no other time, other than infancy, in a human being's development that so many changes take place in such a short amount of time.



- Remember your child in infancy?
  - Development is not linear.
  - The early stages of puberty can occur from age 10-14 in males (8-14 in females). So there is a wide range of normal.

#### **Physical Signs of Puberty**



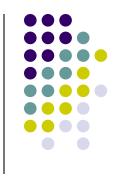
- Early adolescents are starting to grow and their bodies are starting to turn into adult bodies.
- They are experiencing "hormonal changes" which are fluxes in growth hormones and testosterone.
  These hormones cause
  - Muscle growth
  - Broadening of the shoulders
  - Growth of penis and testicles
  - Pubic, underarm, and body hair
  - Increase in sex drive

### **Coping With Physical Changes**



- Eating Healthy Foods
  - Healthy proteins
  - Mom's meatloaf vs. a Quarter Pounder (or 2!)
- Discuss shaving
  - Typically not until after 15
- Growing out of clothing
- Setting a curfew

#### Behavioral Signs of Puberty



- Early adolescents are becoming more independent.
  - They want to make their own choices and are less likely to comply.
  - They want to do things on their own and not be with family.

### Behavioral Signs of Puberty Continued



- Adolescents want to develop same age friendships and their behaviors are based on choices they make to "fit in".
  - Clothing choices
  - Music choices
  - Activity choices
- Peer pressure is often times "indirect".
  - Who are they hanging out with?
  - Girls at puberty

### Behavioral Signs of Puberty Continued



- They have a fragile self-image during this stage and worry about "being normal", "being attractive"
- May become preoccupied with sex or worrying about nocturnal ejaculation ("wet dreams").
- These worries often are manifested in irritability or seeming short-tempered.

### Behavioral Signs of Puberty Continued



- Early adolescents often feel watched.
- Have "magical thinking" about solutions to problems and their role in them.
  - Need to address myths
- They start thinking about sex and may masturbate.
- They test limits and exaggerate personal problems.

#### **How to Cope with Puberty**



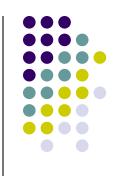
- Family rules:
  - Eat dinner together as a family. Teens who eat with their families 2x/week or less are 72% more likely to use cigarettes, drugs, and alcohol. Teens who eat with their family 5-6 nights a week are 31% less likely to use drugs/alcohol.
  - Screen Time Tokens. This is a strategy used to reduce sedentary activities such as video games, computer time, television viewing time while increasing compliance with chores and encouraging exercise.

#### Communicating with your son:



- Find "the activity" that promotes boys communication (walking the dog together, shooting hoops, driving in the car, etc.).
- Be direct when communicating and use them as consultants and problems solvers (Kindlon and Thompson, 1999)
  - Instead of "How are you feeling?" ask "How angry are you?"
  - "What would your friend have done in that situation?"
  - "What have you heard about....?"
  - Give bottom line first then fill in the details (Miron & Miron, 2001) "Use a condom every time" then fill in the details
- Avoid being reactionary and solving problems FOR them.

### communicating with your son cont'd:



- Compliment them for implementing values.
  - "It's very loyal of you to cover for your friend..."
  - "I appreciate your honesty."
- Understand that anger is usually bred from shame (teacher or parents' criticism, rejection from a crush). It can also mask fear or sadness, both feelings that threaten a boy's masculinity.
- Take their thoughts and fears seriously

## What Does it Mean to be a Man?



- "Teach boys that emotional courage IS courage, and that courage and empathy are the sources of real strength in life." (Kindlon and Thompson, 1999, p 249)
  - There are many ways to "be a man"
    - Giving to charities
    - Helping others
- Helping him understand his vulnerability is human and accepting it.

### Watch for Signs of Mental Health Problems



- Impairment in functioning
  - Drop in grades
  - Abrupt change of peer group
  - Major conflicts with parents
- Change in sleep patterns
- Change in eating patterns/appetite
- Breaking rules (truancy, skipping classes, stealing, unsafe sex, drugs, alcohol)
- Neglected appearance.
- Sudden happiness after a depression

#### Resources/References



- Caring for Kids: Useful Information & Hard to Find Facts About Child Health & Development by Riley Hospital for Children
- Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys by Kindlon and Thompson
- How to Talk With Teens About Love, Relationships, and S-E-X by Amy and Charles Miron
- The Boys Body Book by Kelli Dunham
- Teens.webmd.com