Adolescents experience rapid growth and changes in a number of areas including physical changes, changes in cognition, changes in their relationships with peers and family, and increasing their independence.

In regards to physical changes, pre-adolescence and adolescence is a time where bodies change. Teenagers grow taller, their muscles become stronger, they may grow facial and leg hair, and they will go through puberty. With these changes comes additional skills that need to be taught (for example, how to shave).

There is also cognitive growth; adolescents are talking and asking questions about things they never used to question. Teens may express opinions about faith and trust or politics and religion. This represents a change in their thinking style, going from a concrete pattern of thinking (for example, focusing on the here and now) and moving towards abstract thinking (in other words, things that cannot be seen or touched).

Social relationships are also changing. The same kids who used to play Legos® and video games only last week may no longer want to do these same activities. Typical teens, at this age, shift their focus away from their parents and family and look more towards their peers for social approval, for fashion consultation, and behavior morals. Being with Mom and Dad and the family is just not so “cool” anymore. Social acceptance and fitting in with their peer group becomes important to most teens. How all of this impacts the individual adolescent has a great bearing on his or her emotional health and behavioral well being.

Additionally, life gets considerably more complicated in Middle School. Students are expected to change classes, learn from different teachers and adapt to different teaching styles, be responsible for their classwork and homework assignments, and manage the demands of a busy schedule (for example, school, work, and social life)! This is not an easy thing to do. Many adolescents have a
difficult time with these issues, and these difficulties may be even more pronounced for adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Teachers, counselors, and other support staff are trained to help teens with many of the complications that arise during this age period. Adolescents with ASD can be happy, will continue to grow and learn, in their own time, at their own rate, with the support of adults to help them through any bumps along the way.

Watch and listen to Judith Miller, PhD discuss Adolescence in Autism Spectrum disorders:

From the perspective of a middle school aged teen, watch this video:
Some of the more common difficulties and things to be aware of during adolescence are discussed in the Related Articles listed below.

Related Articles:

- Executive Function Difficulties
- Anxiety in Children with ASD
- Depression
- Bullying
- Co-occurring Conditions or Co-morbidities
- Sexuality Instruction for Tweens, Teens and Young Adults
- Puberty for Girls: Physical Changes and Menstruation
- Puberty in Girls: Discussing Masturbation
- Male Puberty: From Physical Changes to Masturbation
- Teaching Your Child Hygiene and Grooming Skills
- Friendship, Teenagers, and ASD

The Center for Autism Research and The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia do not endorse or recommend any specific person or organization or form of treatment. The information included within the CAR Autism Roadmap & trade; and CAR Resource Directory & trade; should not be considered medical advice and should serve only as a guide to resources publicly and privately available. Choosing a treatment, course of action, and/or a resource is a personal decision, which should take into account each individual's and family's particular circumstances.