

stuck in the middle

Being a teen isn't always easy. It's kind of an in-between time—you're not a little kid anymore, but you're not an adult either. It's hard trying to figure out who you are and where you fit in. Things are always changing...

All of a sudden, you and your best friend may stop hanging out together. Sometimes friends grow apart, which can be hard. It happens because during these years not only is your body changing, but so are your interests, your approach to life, and your ideas. It's normal that friendships will change and that new friendships will grow.

You may feel that your parents don't listen to you, understand you, or trust you. A lot of things can become an issue—homework, grades, dating, driving, clothes, chores, curfew, and money. You want the freedom to make your own decisions. But you still depend on your parents for a lot of things (you know, important things like good advice, a place to live, and food to eat) and they expect you to follow their rules. This struggle between making your own decisions and relying on your parents can cause problems.

Whether your parents bother you about the way you dress or whether your friendships are on and off, you can avoid unnecessary arguments and keep important relationships on good terms by using these three things—communication, respect, and responsibility—as you navigate from childhood to adulthood (which is what the puberty trip is all about).

1

Communication

Unless the other person is psychic, they can't read your mind. So if you want someone to understand you better, you have to let them know with your words what you're thinking, what's on your mind, and how you feel.

2

Respect

Everyone (you, your parent, your friend, your brother or sister) has a right to his or her own feelings, values, and beliefs. Respect other people's opinions even if they are different from yours. That means no put-downs or trying to convince the other person that their beliefs are wrong. You don't have to agree with them, but try to see things from the other person's point of view.

3

Responsibility

Keeping your word and following through helps to earn trust from parents and friends. This shows the people around you that you are responsible, reliable, and capable of making good decisions.

feeling different

Everyone is different.

All of us are different from others in some way. Think about it: each of us has our own race, athletic abilities, academic strengths, body size and shape, kinds of clothes we wear, color and style of our hair, religion, attraction to other people, family situation, family rules, and beliefs about the world. So, really, being different is normal. Who you are is complicated, and is changing as you are growing up.



how do I fit in?

Just like you, most other teens are wondering about their differences and how they will fit in at school. Figuring out who you are and how you fit in is not easy and might feel very lonely sometimes. Friends and other people at school may have ideas about what you should wear, think, like, or do. Wanting to be liked is definitely natural. It can be hard to be yourself when you feel that other people are watching or judging you. Try to pay attention to yourself and what is right for you. Remember, differences are what make you interesting.

inside out

Self-esteem is how you feel about yourself. It's the amount of confidence you have in yourself.

When your self-esteem is high, you will:

- Have a positive outlook on life
- Believe in yourself
- Be more likely to succeed than to fail
- Do better in school
- Be better able to resist peer pressure
- Get along better with other people
- Be open to doing and learning new things
- Respect your body and brain
- Usually try your best
- Be happy being yourself

Having high self-esteem does not mean that you are stuck up or snobby or that you will never make mistakes. It's about believing in yourself and what you think you can do.

Be nice to yourself. Don't give yourself a hard time.



There are many ways that you can improve your self-esteem. Here are some tips to think about. You might use them all, or choose the ones that you think are best for you.

Do things you love and are good at.

If you can't think of anything, look around for new things to learn.

Take action.

Don't let low self-esteem take control of you. When you take action, make changes and have successes, you will start to feel a lot better about yourself.

Dare to dream.

Think about how you would like things to be in your life. Set goals for yourself. Choose one thing at a time. Be careful about taking on too much at once.

Give yourself the right to make a mistake

or to be "not perfect." Mistakes are a great opportunity to learn about yourself. Don't waste the chance.

Celebrate successes.

Think of times you have tried something new and succeeded. Remember that successes come in large and small sizes. How did you feel? What did you learn about yourself?

Challenge yourself.

Try new things. Practice. Learn what works for you and what doesn't.

Be true to yourself.

You will never be able to make everyone happy or meet everyone's expectations. Learn about what makes you happy.

Get involved in life.

Join a club or volunteer in your community.



Having self-esteem does not mean that you are stuck up or snobby or that you will never make mistakes.

Protect yourself on the Internet

Don't share personal information about yourself or your family over the Internet. Don't communicate with anyone who tries to bully or scare you. Don't agree to meet in person with anyone you don't know.

Bullying

Bullying is the act of scaring or hurting another person over and over again. Picking on someone who is weaker or different is mean and wrong.

How to handle bullies

- Don't put up with behavior that hurts other people.
- Ignore the bully and walk away.

- Learn how to not react to bullies. Stand tall, be proud, and show them you're in control.
- Stay calm and don't get upset.
- Ask for help (from a parent, teacher, or other trusted adult) if you, or someone you know, is being bullied.

Cyberbullying

With cell phones and computers, bullying can happen quickly and hurt just as bad as if in person. Cyberbullying is sending cruel messages by email or text, or posting insults on a website. Tell an adult if someone is sending you texts or email messages or posting comments that make you feel threatened or scared.