

Spotlight on the Young Adolescent

October is Month of the Young Adolescent. Initiated several years ago by the National Middle School Association, the spotlight beams on the middle school student—those 11-14 years olds who have bid good-bye to childhood and are moving toward full adolescence.

During this transition time our middle school youth undergo more extensive physical, mental, social, moral, and emotional changes, with the possible exception of infancy, than at any other time of life. The only constant is CHANGE.

You have probably noticed: growth spurts, height and weight changes, cracking voices, coordination issues, “growing pains,” ravenous appetites, restlessness, and physiological changes brought on by puberty and the rush of sex hormones. Many middle school students feel self conscious and uncomfortable because these changes are so visible. “Everybody’s watching me!” Additionally, wide variations in timing mean there are late bloomers and early bloomers, which can cause anxiety and confusion.

Sighs, rolling eyes, one word responses, mood swings, irritability, argumentativeness, anger, sadness. “NOBODY UNDERSTANDS ME!” Daily life for the middle school students can be an emotional roller-coaster. Early adolescence is a time of ups and downs but the image of the wildly rebellious teen is not the norm! Just remember that the job of an adolescent is to develop a stable identity, move toward independence and eventually become a competent adult. Conflicts are inevitable.

It has been suggested that the only thing harder than being a teen is parenting one! Just remember, young teens are starting the journey toward self reliance, but parents are still their role models and guides. You are their most important influence!