

## “IT WILL NEVER HAPPEN TO ME”

### SOLUTIONS TO YOUR LIFE WITH A TEENAGER

Adolescents typically demonstrate behaviors that reflect several myths of being a teenager:

- The first myth is that they are "**on stage**" with the attention of everyone else constantly centered upon their appearance or actions. This preoccupation stems from the fact that adolescents spend so much time thinking about and looking at themselves, it is only natural to assume that everyone else is also thinking and looking at them as well. In reality, **this doesn't occur** because "everyone else" (usually their peers) is too preoccupied with their own issues. This normal self-centeredness may appear (especially to adults) to border on paranoia, narcissism, or even hysteria, but it is a normal (but sometimes frustrating) stage of development for teens.
- Another myth of adolescence is that of the indestructible self. This belief feeds into the thought of "***it will never happen to me, only the other person***". In this sense, "it" may represent becoming pregnant or incurring a sexually-transmitted disease after having unprotected intercourse, causing an car crash while driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, developing oral cancer as a result of chewing tobacco, or any of the numerous adverse effects of a wide range of risk-taking behaviors. Adolescent brains are still developing their impulse control connections and it is up to parents to be the "voice of reason" and set limits for the teen.
- Teens also tend to believe that ***no one else has ever experienced similar feelings and emotions***. They may become overly dramatic in describing things that are upsetting to them. They may say things like "You'll never understand," or "My life is ruined!" listening over and over to music that reflects their mood one minute and then be happy and up beat the next. Remember adolescent bodies are experiencing large up and down swings of hormone levels for the first time in their young lives. They need adults to understand and give them room to be dramatic – within a safe environment.

#### Safety:

Adolescent safety issues stem from increased strength and agility that may develop before decision-making skills develop. A strong need for peer approval, coupled with the myths of adolescence, may entice a young person to attempt hazardous feats, or participate in a variety of risk-taking behaviors.

Despite adolescents constantly challenging authority figures, they need or want limit-setting, as it provides a safe boundary in which to grow and function. Limit-setting refers to predetermined and negotiated rules and regulations regarding behavior.

Appropriate motor vehicle safety should be emphasized, focusing upon the roles of driver/passenger/pedestrian, the influence of substance abuse, and the importance of using seatbelts. Privileges associated with cars and recreational motor vehicles should depend upon the adolescent's ability to demonstrate an adequate knowledge base and safe use of such vehicles.

Adolescents pursuing recreational athletic activities should be taught to use adequate equipment, protective gear or clothing, safe facilities, proper rules of safe play, and rational approaches to activities requiring advanced skill levels.

Young people need to be acutely aware of the potential dangers -- including sudden death -- which may occur not only with regular substance abuse, but even experimental use of drugs and alcohol.

Adolescence is a wonderful time of life – filled with idealism, energy, humor and fun. It is up to adults/parents to help children learn how to successfully maneuver the stumbling blocks of growing up into adulthood and responsibility.

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