

Nine Things Teens Should Know

and Parents are Afraid to Talk About

9

Countdown to Adolescence

**Joe White &
Nicholas Comminellis**

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Contents

Foreword.....	6
Preface for Parents	9
Preface for Teens.....	19
Chapter 1 Crazy Emotions	28
Chapter 2 “I Think I’m in Love!”	42
Chapter 3 Sex . . . Waiting for the Best.....	58
Chapter 4 Finding Real Friends.....	78
Chapter 5 Public Enemy Number One.....	96
Chapter 6 Trash In/Trash Out	112
Chapter 7 Getting Along with Parents.....	140
Chapter 8 Total Body Makeover.....	158
Chapter 9 Search for Self-Esteem.....	176
The Authors	192

Foreword

Tucked into the beautiful Ozark Mountains — where I also happen to live — is one of the best-known “secrets” in the country.

I’m talking about Kanakuk Kamps, run by my good friend Joe White. A summer home to thousands of teens each year, Kanakuk reflects Joe’s very large heart: full of love and compassion and understanding for new generations trying to find their place in the world. Outdoors activities are integrated with plenty of talk of values and faith. For years, parents have trusted Kanakuk and Joe White to be a positive, guiding force in the spiritual and social development of their children’s lives and future.

Because of that, I’m very pleased to be able to recommend the latest book by Joe and his long-time co-author, Nicholas Comminellis. Joe and Nicholas are releasing *9 Things Teens Should Know And Parents are Afraid to Talk About*.

Nicholas, who volunteers much of his time at the Kamps each summer, and Joe have a desire to bring parents and their kids closer together — strengthening the family and its faith in a chaotic world where children are barraged with messages and temptations that can profoundly alter their lives in the worst of ways. At this critical stage of growing up, it can never be said too strongly how vital a strong foundation of faith and family support for these

young people can be. The importance of faith and family is something I've built my own ministry on, so this new book was easy for me to absorb and get excited about. Designed to foster dialogue between parent and child, the book is easy to read and the many relevant applications will, I trust, make it an invaluable guide for parents who want to do a better job communicating with their teens — and vice versa! I believe this book will be an important guide for parents and an important bridge of communications to young people in addressing some of the most turbulent issues in society today.

I heartily recommend it; read it and be blessed.

Gary Smalley

Parents

Preface for Parents

Adolescence is a critical time for both parents and their children. Your kids are rapidly moving toward adulthood and experiencing enormous physical, emotional, and social changes. Yet many obstacles lie between them and a successful transition. Your relationship with your kids is also developing new dimensions, which may add either closeness or great distance between the two of you.

When your child was an infant and toddler, he or she required constant physical care — hours on hours of feeding, bathing, dressing, and cuddling. As the years progressed, your role changed more toward encouraging intellectual and social development. You did homework together, pursued mutual hobbies, and arranged sleepovers with friends.

Now as an adolescent, more than ever, your child needs clear guidance. In a few short years, your child will be much more independent, immersed in the teen world — a world filled with hazards. Alcoholism, drug addictions, pregnancy, violence, law violations, and suicide are often the first ones that come to mind, but other hazards also abound: depression, physical injuries, parental conflicts,

pornography (both the overt and subtle), and poor school performance.

Each year at Kanakuk Kamps in the mountains of Missouri and Colorado, Joe White and his staff host 20,000 kids in a transparent environment that fosters an amazing amount of open communication. One crying need among many teenage campers is how dearly they want to spend more time with their parents, how much they desire direction in life from Mom and Dad, and how they treasure the advice their parents can give — if they only would do so!

In medical practice, Dr. Nicholas Comminellis encounters multitudes of young people suffering the physical consequences of their misunderstandings about adolescence and the treacherous transition to adult life. They are often facing these crises alone because their parents are uninterested, too preoccupied, or completely absent.

You have a unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make a difference in your child's life. As he or she gets ready to enter the teen years, you likely have the last extended opportunity ever to give your children the knowledge and skills required for conversion to adult life.

You probably have your doubts, but as your child's parent, there is no one who is better qualified to guide them through this critical stage. No one else knows your child's character like you do. You've lived with them for years. No one else loves your child as ferociously as you do. You've sacrificed vast quantities of sleep, energy, and money on their behalf. No one has a stronger interest in your child's success than you do. You're willing to give

whatever it takes to see them prosper in life. In spite of their mood swings and phases of resistance, after counseling countless adolescents we are convinced that parents hold the keys to a child's heart like no other human being on earth.

GIVING UP AT HALFTIME

In spite of these truths, most parents don't talk to their children about anything more than the superficial issues of daily life: their schedules, homework, and household chores. It's no wonder, then, that such kids are more likely to encounter problems as adolescents — problems with potentially devastating consequences.

By guiding your child through this stage of life, you both prepare him or her for success, and help to protect yourself from profound disappointments. James Dobson, president of Focus on the Family, explains:

The primary reason adolescence is so distressing is because youngsters do not fully understand what is happening to them. Many of their fears and anxieties and discouragements could be obviated by a simple instructional program.¹

Yet where is the program? Where are the parents? In particular, where are the fathers? The average father of a teenager will only spend three and a half minutes a day talking with his son, but will spend about 40 hours a week working, 50 hours sleeping, and 7 hours dressing and grooming.

Multiplied over a lifetime, you can see the problem. The average father spends 25 years sleeping, 12 years working, 3 years grooming, and only 11 days and 16 hours talking to his son or daughter. A survey in a teen magazine found that only four and a half percent of America's teenage girls felt that they could go to their father with a serious problem. Is this any wonder, given the little investment most fathers make into their kids' lives?

SECOND-RATE COACHES

Lacking the active input of parents, children are going elsewhere to learn about adolescence and the "adult world." Just where are they looking?

First of all, they turn to their peers — especially those who are a year or two older. While your child may be fortunate to have a teenage mentor who will point him or her in the right direction, getting reliable guidance from another teen is quite a gamble. Your child might get lucky, but the odds are remote. Chances are that he or she will wind up following an older peer who has far less insight than you would ever choose.

Another major source of education about teen life is television and movies, but like finding a reliable teen mentor, this investment has an extremely low yield. Instead of viewing something enlightening, by the time the average teenager is 18, he or she will see over 18,000 murders on television. Of the 50,000 to 100,000 sexual encounters that a typical teen will see on TV, over 92 percent are in pre-marital or extra-marital relationships. This should come as absolutely no surprise. Surveys of

Hollywood's most influential TV writers and producers consistently demonstrate their support of "realistic" violence and pre-marital sex, while also confirming their disdain for anything moral, much less religious.

No wonder Bing Crosby observed, "Writers and producers are working nudity, permissiveness, irresponsibility, profanity, scenes of semi-explicit sex, provocative dialogue, smutty innuendoes and situations into their shows. . . . I fear they are depicting life as it is going to be if they are not diverted." These media moguls are the very people who create the videos our teenagers are entertained with an average of three to four hours a day!

A third incredibly powerful influence on children is music. Just look at the CD collection and stereo equipment that many of them possess! Notice how children are attracted to pop music's star performers. Recognize the number of hours a day they spend bathing in the rhythms and their messages. The typical teen spends over two hours a day plugged in! That's a minimum of 75,000 songs between the ages of 13 and 19.

What are these songs about? You may be shocked when you take the time to read the lyrics. The most perverted, profane, degenerate blitz of information to ever infiltrate the minds of youth is exactly what's found in most of the top-selling popular music: messages of lawlessness, unfaithfulness, raw sex, homosexuality, murder, and suicide.

GAMES, INTERNET?

Lacking your personal guidance, the alternative influences over your child in this susceptible time are quite

often deadly. Peer pressure prowls your neighborhood and schools like a street gang looking for a new recruit. The media bombards your child with perverted role models who dare, “Come live like me!” All the while, popular music is chanting the most perverted of all messages, enticing your child to give in.

TWO-MINUTE WARNING!

As adolescence is beginning to dawn, a growing number of parents are waking up and committing themselves to prepare their kids. These parents accept the challenge to train them and to equip them in spite of fatigue, time restraints, and uncertainty.

The courage and conviction of these parents — parents like you — is admirable. What they often lack, however, is a tool to help them begin. What do kids most need to know about adolescence? How can it be explained? What questions most perplex them? Which answers are most helpful?

The purpose of this book is to help communicate the vital information pre-teens both desire and require. While reading alone will be profitable for your child, the experience will be much more effective if you discuss the topics together. For this reason, we encourage you to take time to read *Nine Things Teens Should Know* for yourself.

Make time to ask your child for his or her thoughts, feelings, or opinions on what they are reading in this book. Make the experience as interactive as possible. You may also find that recounting stories from your own adolescence

will both make your child feel at ease and help to enhance the discussions you have together.

You may feel uncomfortable discussing some subjects, especially those related to sex and relationships. Most of us remember the discomfort we ourselves felt when our own parents tried to talk with us about similar matters. But don't worry too much! A degree of anxiety is normal. You may even want to diffuse the situation by sharing with your child the anxiety you are feeling.

As you talk, also take time to express your affection for your kid. Point out and compliment their successes, aspirations, energy, imagination, and dreams. The truths contained in this book, along with your personal affirmation, can combine to make the experience of preparing for adolescence one your child will treasure, and one that will bring the two of you closer together.

Each chapter of *Nine Things Teens Should Know* is divided into three sections for easier comprehension:

- *Getting to the Core.* This is the essential information about the subject of the chapter.

Stories that relate are also intermingled. Feel free to share your own similar experiences as you talk with your kid about the chapter.

- *What Do You Think?* These are personal application questions the reader can consider alone. Or better yet, the two of you can discuss your responses together.

- *For Teen Eyes Only.* This contains a challenge for teens to take action on the subject. At

the end of each chapter, be sure to ask your kid what decision or conclusion he or she reached about the subject.

Adolescence is different for each child. For this reason, the content of this book must be general in nature. If you feel at some point that your child's development or behavior may be peculiar, worrisome, or abnormal be sure to consult a professional. Talking with your child's physician, school guidance counselor, youth group leader, or mental health consultant may be an excellent resource for assistance.

GOAL

This time investment you make into your kid is one of the wisest of all parental choices. With the right preparation, the incredibly dangerous environment your teen enters can become one that brings out the best in them, especially against the backdrop of their confused and distraught peers. Preparing your child for adolescence can also be an experience that brings out the very best in you; one that demonstrates your own foresight, dedication, and true love.

If you plant a tree in an open field where the wind blows and light comes from every angle, chances are that it will only grow short and round. If you plant a sapling in a dense forest where the trees are erect and the light comes from above, chances are good this small tree will grow tall and straight. It can be exactly the same with your child. The combination of good role models and clear direction

will inspire your teen to grow up with wisdom, strength, and stature.

The pressure is on. The game is almost over. Help your child prepare for the scrimmages of adolescence. In just a few short years, yours can be the great satisfaction of seeing an 18-year-old son or daughter win the game, having victoriously passed through the most tumultuous period of a life!

Notes

1. James Dobson, *Hide or Seek* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1974), p. 108.

Teens

Preface for Teens

Growing up is all about change and development. If you've owned pets, you've witnessed firsthand how they transform from playful, clumsy babies to assured, mature adults. If you have siblings, you can't help but observe how their interests have altered from, say dolls, to friends, and then to boyfriends or girlfriends. No doubt you've also noticed the physical transformation among your buddies and classmates. Year by year, they become taller, smarter (hopefully), and more athletic than before.

Certainly you're aware that your own body is changing. You may have noticed that your clothes are tighter or shorter than they used to be, you're switching shoe sizes every few months, or you're starting to discover body hair in unusual places.

What's more, you're likely aware that your interests are on the move. You're not attracted to the style of clothes that once appealed to you. Your pet animals may not be as entertaining anymore. You may not be as interested as before in hanging out with your brothers or sisters. Your preference in friends has altered, so that some who once seemed fun aren't so much anymore, and vice versa.

You are entering a very special stage of life called adolescence. It's the final step — the final quarter — between being a child and becoming a fully developed adult. Adolescence involves changes that affect almost every part of your life, including your body, your emotions, your relationship with your parents, your interaction with friends, and your goals and dreams for the future.

Adolescence is a stage filled with enormous ideas and energy. It can be by far the most exciting, wonderful experience of your life to date. It can also be a time filled with self-doubt, depression, and anxiety — a phase you agonize through almost everyday.

Consider the plight of Chris:

Sixth grade was an extremely tough year. I was attending a new elementary school where the boys were bigger and liked to push me around at the bus stop. I was having trouble reading, and got put into a special education class. At one point I became covered with poison ivy, and had to sit in an isolated corner of the room, from where the other kids jeered me. "Touch him and you'll get infected," they'd call to one another.

Embarrassing black hair started growing on my legs, and then on my upper lip. I'd sneak into my parent's bathroom and scrape the nasty black stuff off of my face with a razor, cutting myself in the process. A short time later, friends invited me to a pool party. It was then that I faced one of the greatest dilemmas of my youth: should I shave the

black hair off my legs before I go? Questions plagued me. What would my friends say if they discovered how burly I really was? What if I cut myself again and had to get stitches? In the end, I just told my friends I couldn't go, but I felt terrible for days about missing the fun I should've had with them.

Then there was Stacy. Every time I saw her, these incredibly wild emotions exploded within me. We'd play dodge ball together at recess and I'd come back into school feeling like a million bucks. We'd be picked to raise the flag in front of our school, and I'd come in flying like a kite. The day Stacy pressed a love letter into my hand I must have soared to a thousand feet, but a few days later Stacy told me to "flake off" and I felt as though I had crashed into a million pieces.

The year reached a crisis one afternoon when I got home from school. Suddenly I began crying. I don't know why, I just felt like it. I cried my heart out, wailing and all. The sobs brought my mother scurrying from the yard.

Alarmed at my tears, she put her arms around me and urged, "Honey, what's wrong?"

"You really want to know?" I replied sarcastically, pulling away. So I unloaded on her about the irritating bigger boys, the "special" reading class, the hairy epidemic infecting my body; and yes, even my infatuation with Stacy.

At first my mother looked very worried, like I might have become a mental case or something.

When I finally finished describing my plight, she took on a look of reassurance. “Chris, don’t worry,” she sighed. “You’re just going through adolescence.”

“Ado-what?” I replied. “Whatever you call it, I don’t like it!” I shook my head firmly.

“Chris,” Mom continued, “adolescence is just a normal part of growing up. Let’s talk about it some more.”

My mom started opening up to me about what she went through as a kid, about her embarrassing moments and struggles to find true friends. I discovered she had been through much of the same stuff I was feeling. She even helped me figure out how to deal with my hair and what to do next time I saw Stacy. I felt so glad we could talk like this.

COACHING THE FINAL QUARTER

Parents, teachers, and youth pastors are like the coaches of a sports team. Their job is to prepare the players for real competition. They start by teaching the fundamentals of the game. Next, they train players in the more complex strategies of winning. Along the way, coaches instruct the athletes how to play fair, avoid injuries, and deal with unexpected turns in the game. It’s not just theory they are trying to get across, but actual skills essential for real play.

That play gets particularly rough in the final quarter. The competition is vigorous, the team is easily frustrated, the goal is only yards away, and the clock keeps

ticking. Adolescence is like that. There's so much to learn, so many experiences to try out, and so little time in which to accomplish it all.

ADOLESCENT GAME PLAN

For victory in the final quarter, you must have great coaches, but even coaches need a playbook — one that spells out the sure-fire strategies for success. Someone gave you this book because they have your best interests at heart. They want you to enjoy adolescence and take advantage of all the great adventures it can bring. They want to see you shine during these years, and carry that shimmer with you into adulthood. The discoveries you make while reading this book will help you become a happier, stronger, more confident person. The truths you'll encounter in these pages will also catapult you miles ahead of your peers, many of whom will have to figure out the secrets of adolescence on their own.

I (Joe) wobbled through the difficult years of elementary to junior high school with an embarrassment that would not go away: two giant silver front teeth. A sports accident cost me half of my two front teeth that had to be capped with chrome. My summer camp counselor called me "Grill Face," like my face was the front end of a car. As if I didn't feel awkward enough over my looks, trying to keep up with ever-changing hair styles, clothing styles, and fighting for a starting position on the football and basketball teams, my teeth made me feel every day like I was just trying to survive. This book could have definitely helped me get through those tough years!

BODY BY DESIGN

As surely as a meager caterpillar develops inexpressibly into a majestic butterfly, all living creatures were designed by God with a life cycle; certain stages of development that the creature goes through as a normal part of existence. It is no different in the case of humans.

Between a newborn baby and fully developed adult lie a multitude of physical, emotional, and social changes. Adolescence is a period of time during which these changes happen the fastest. For boys, this stage usually begins around 10–12 years of age. To most boys chagrin, girls start sooner, and 9–10 is more the norm. In either case, the intense experience of adolescence can be expected to last five or six years. With all the changes that must take place, your mind and body will be very busy during this time span.

Occasionally, like Chris did, young people sometimes equate adolescence with some kind of disease. It is true that this stage of life is accompanied by some striking physical and emotional upheavals, but be assured, these are entirely normal. Adolescence is as natural a part of life as a baby learning to walk or a kid throwing a ball.

In the following chapters we'll investigate some of the biggest changes and issues that happen during adolescence. We'll look into:

- Emotional changes — how your mind learns to deal with new experiences.
- Romantic feelings — the way your heart responds to your natural attraction for those of the opposite sex.

- Social life — the new patterns of interacting with people of your own age.
- Substance abuse— how to resist the temptations which can lead to drug and alcohol addiction.
- Media influence — ways to take control over what you watch and listen to.
- Parental relationships — getting along better with your mom and dad.
- Physical changes — the way your body prepares itself for adulthood.
- Self-esteem issues — feeling good about who you are and where you're going in life.

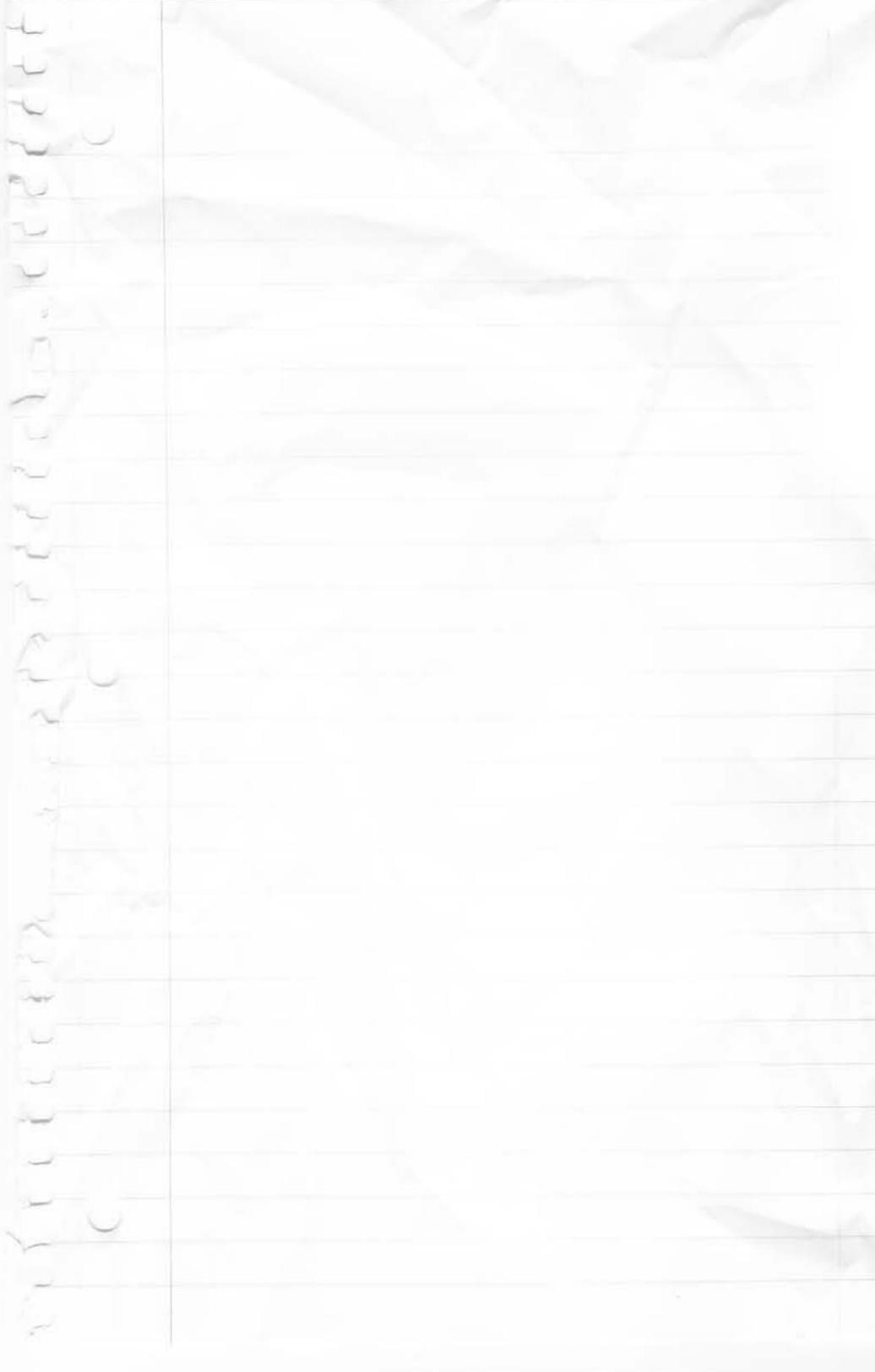
Each chapter of *Countdown To Adolescence* is divided into three sections to help you make the most of your read:

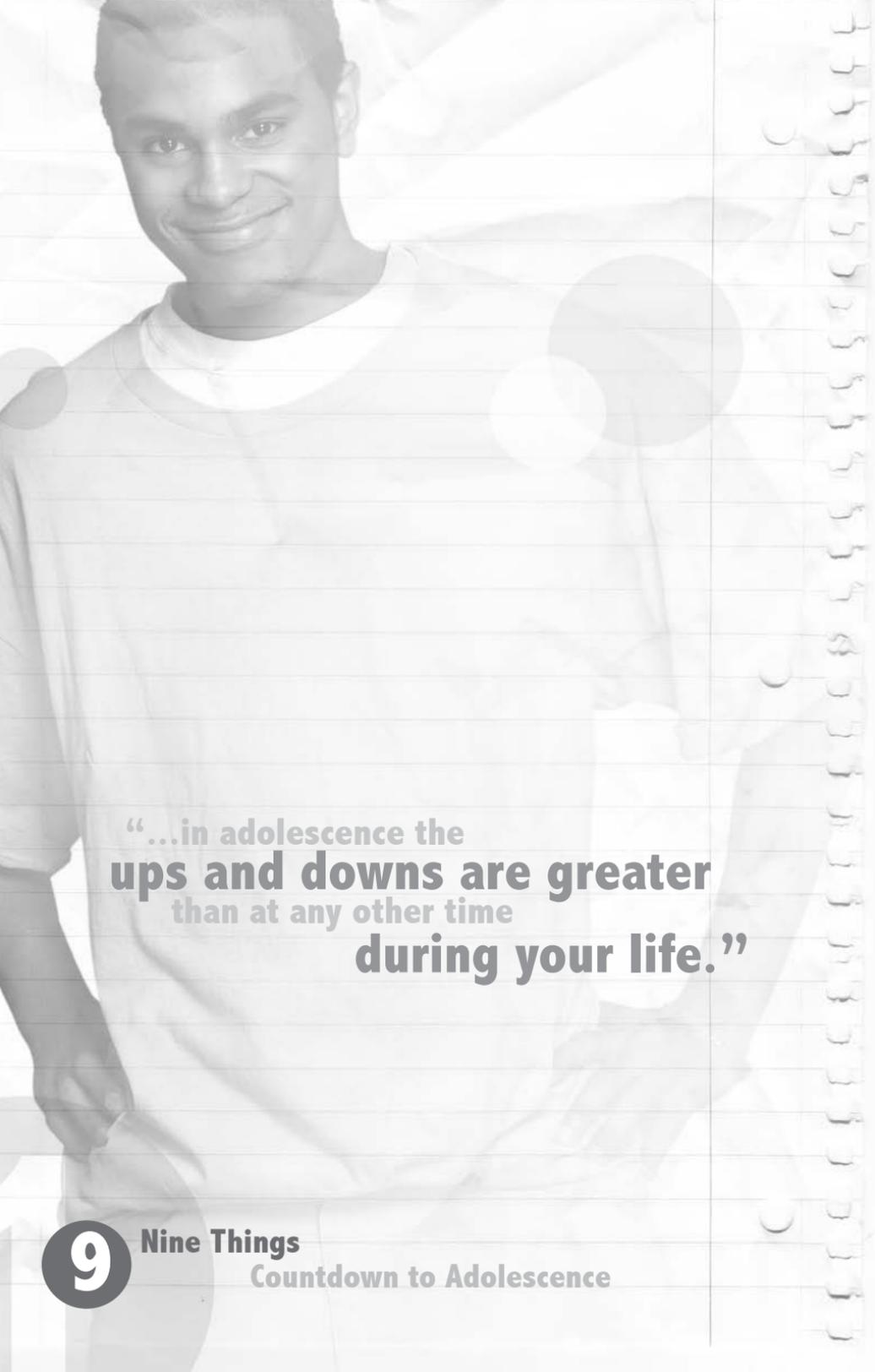
- *Getting to the Core.* This is the essential truth about the subject.
- *What Do You Think?* These are some questions to consider that might help you to apply the core information.
- *For Teen Eyes Only.* This last section contains a challenge for you to reach a decision or to take a stand, one that will make you proud!

Your parents may be reading this book along with you. They may want to talk with you about it, or even share some of their own experiences with adolescence.

This may make you feel uneasy, but give your parents a chance. They really can help make the whole process of growing up more trouble-free and enjoyable.

You may breeze over some of the hurdles of adolescence with barely a bump. Others may seem too high to ever pass over, but do not lose heart. While adolescence is a challenging period in life, you can enjoy this stage like none before, and emerge on the other side totally prepared to take on the exciting adult world!





“...in adolescence the
ups and downs are greater
than at any other time
during your life.”

9

Nine Things

Countdown to Adolescence

Chapter

1

Crazy Emotions

GETTING TO THE CORE

The physical changes of adolescence are striking, but even more remarkable are the changes that will occur inside your head. As an adolescent, you experience some feelings that are entirely new to you. You also experience familiar feelings, but with more intensity than you ever imagined.

Adolescents tend to feel stronger about almost everything — regardless of the subject. Joys seems greater. Disappointments feel deeper. Friendships are more cherished. Adversaries are more disdained. Sometimes you feel extremely scared or incredibly proud. Other times you feel terribly sad or explosively exuberant. You also may not be sure exactly what you are feeling, only that, whatever it is, the sensation is overwhelming! The fear of sudden rises and falls of your first roller coaster ride is nothing compared to some of the emotional peaks and valleys you face.

Together, we're going to explore some of the most common emotional experiences of young people. It's helpful to be familiar with these feelings in advance. This way, when they happen you won't be surprised, and you may even be able to take better advantage of your tremendous emotional energy.

SOMETIMES UP, SOMETIMES DOWN

Everyone's emotions naturally fluctuate, but in adolescence the ups and downs are greater than at any other time during your life. Occasionally, you go through periods of feeling certain that you are worthless; that no one anywhere really loves you; that there is nothing to anticipate in life but depression. Don't worry — these feelings are not at all permanent!

Josh, age 14, explains the experience:

You never know what life's going to throw at you. You can be really happy one day, and the next feel like nothing could go more wrong. A lot of times I wake up in the morning and things seem so perfect. I make it to the bus on time and my classes are going great. Then all it takes is one person to say one thing negative to me, and my day is ruined! It works the opposite way, too. A friend will say one little good thing like, "You're really good at acting," or "I like your T-shirt," and all of a sudden I'm feeling wonderful. It helps me to be ready for these ups and downs so I don't feel so devastated by them.

Like Josh, you will also go through stages when you will feel like the entire world is on your side; like you're the luckiest boy or girl in the world; like happiness, peace, and love are everywhere. You'll experience incredible giddiness, energy, and joy.

Regardless of how you are feeling at any instant, it will soon change, guaranteed. If you are riding high on a wave of satisfaction, within a few days or weeks you will probably begin to come down again. If you are experiencing the lowest of lows, in just a short time your emotions will almost always begin to change for the positive.

Swings between times of happiness and sadness are a normal part of being a youth. It's important to realize this fact for two special reasons. First, so that you don't do anything you will later regret while you're at one extreme or another. While in depression, some teens run away from home, get into trouble with the law, turn to drugs and alcohol, or even commit suicide. If they realized that their depression was only a phase they were going through, they might not have made such senseless choices. By just waiting a short time, their emotions would inevitably have perked up.

It's also helpful to use the nature cycle of emotions in planning your activities. When you are in a high-energy phase, it may be a very good time to complete some difficult school assignments, finish an organizing project at home, or other activity that requires creativity and endurance. On the other hand, when you realize you're in a low-energy phase, it may be best to put off challenging jobs that can wait until later. By being aware of your emotional cycles,

you can adjust your activities to match your mood and avoid some frustrations.

Some responsibilities, unfortunately, can't be postponed. Just as your parents likely have a job that they don't totally enjoy all the time, they still get up and go to work when they are expected. They still fulfill their responsibilities once on the job. It's the same for youth. You may be feeling low energy, and not especially interested in your classes or extracurricular activities, but it is your "job" to do your best in spite of your emotional state. Besides, positive activity and accomplishments are one of the greatest remedies for gloominess.

Remember that emotional swings are not confined to adolescence. You'll experience them throughout your life. If you learn to handle them now, you'll have a big advantage over most other teenagers, and many adults, too. Like driving a car or typing, managing your emotional energy is a skill you will use almost every day of your life. The sooner you master it, the more prepared you'll be for life.

NOT ALL AS IT SEEMS

Closely related to fluctuating emotions is a second fact you should be aware of: the unreliability of first impressions, and dangers of being impulsive. All of us, when we meet a new person or encounter new situations, draw conclusions about them: whether the person is trustworthy or the situation is safe, for example. A particular challenge in adolescence is that new situations and first impressions are extremely common. Sometimes your

initial impressions will be absolutely correct, but other times you'll completely miss the mark.

Josh puts it this way:

Nobody shows you who they really are at first. No one wants to trust complete strangers, because they are afraid that you won't like them. Instead, they just show you how cool they are or what they want you to see, even if that's not who they really are. You really need to get to know people before you can trust them.

The problem is that our emotions distort or change the true picture of what is happening around us. If you act upon your initial impulses, you can find yourself in deep predicaments. If you fall in love with a person you just met and try to get too close to him or her, you could easily get slapped! If you feel rage and strike another person, it could put you in trouble with the police. If you get frustrated during a sports team practice and decide to just quit, you may ruin the chance for wonderful athletic victories.

Jesse was in eighth grade when he began looking for a bass player to play in his garage band. Like drummers, good bass players were hard to find, especially someone who already knew the songs Jesse liked. He talked it up at school and then posted a note online. That's when Peter called. Peter was a couple of years older and from a different school district, but Jesse downloaded some songs he'd played on and was impressed. Besides, Jesse had a gig in



just two weeks and was feeling pressure to cancel unless he had someone to play bass.

Jesse told the other guys in the band how excited he was to finally have a bass player. Everyone expressed relief that this obstacle was finally out of the way. Then Peter showed up at band practice with his flashy guitar and effects processor, further impressing Jesse. Peter even played his parts okay. Jesse reassured the host of the party where his band was playing that they'd be ready to play.

With their performance only days away, Jesse's band was rehearsing almost every afternoon. Peter usually showed up, but arrived later and later each time. Jesse also noticed Peter's clothes smelled weird, and he seemed more and more disinterested in the music. One afternoon, just two days away from their show, Peter was looking especially glassy eyed. Instead of tuning up his instrument, he

slouched on the couch, pulled out a marijuana cigarette, and lit it with a match.

“Hey, why all the pressure, guys,” said Peter. “Let’s take it easy for a change. Come share this joint with me.”

Jesse didn’t know what to say. “Hey, Peter, we’re here to play music. Not to get high! Why do you think I asked you to join our band?”

“Well, sure, I want to play music, too,” replied Peter in a disinterested voice, “but the real reason I joined was to find some people to smoke pot with me.”

There is a way to get around the inaccuracies of first impressions: give them time. Time has a way of giving us real experience, allowing our emotions to calm down, of giving our minds a chance to think, of helping us to discern good and evil, right and wrong, better and best. Don’t ignore strong initial impressions, but be very careful about acting upon them until you have time to sort them out. Learn to recognize the difference between an impulse and a well-thought-out idea.

GIVE ME SOME SPACE!

When you were an infant, you needed constant attention from your parents; someone to dress you, bathe you, feed you, and all the rest. As you became stronger and more coordinated, you began to demand, “I can do it myself!” You insisted on playing your own games, reading your own books, and choosing your own foods to eat. With time, you developed talents, likes, and dislikes that were uniquely “you.”

By the time you reach adolescence, you feel pretty comfortable in your ability to care for yourself. You also want even more independence in your decisions than ever before: the right to set your own bedtime, to wear whatever you want, and do your homework when you see fit. Along with this freedom, you want more physical space: your own room, stereo, telephone, and so on. You also want “emotional space” — the freedom to choose when and where you express your private thoughts to others.

You likely feel increasing embarrassment about being around your parents or siblings in public, especially when that “public” includes your friends. At times, this emotion can be so strong you would rather just stay at home than risk being seen with them.

Rachel’s need for space became especially obvious one evening during eighth grade. She was in charge of a youth meeting at church. On the surface, the job was pretty easy. She would just get up in front, welcome everyone, read the announcements, and then lead the singing. What was nerve-wracking was the fact that almost all of Rachel’s best friends were in the crowd. Before leaving home for the meeting she’d rehearse her lines, memorize the songs, and make sure her jeans looked just right.

One evening as Rachel was anxiously getting ready, her mother suddenly popped her head in the door. “Rachel, I’m going to drop your little brother and sister off at the meeting with you tonight.” She smiled, and turned to walk away.

“But Mom!” Rachel gasped in sudden anguish, “you can’t do that!”

“Well, why not, Honey?” her mother replied innocently. “I’ve got to go grocery shopping and they won’t want to come.”

“But all my friends will be there! Please don’t do this to me!” Rachel’s previous anxiety over leading suddenly paled in comparison to the embarrassment of being seen with her siblings.

“What’s the big deal?” her mother persisted. “Is there something wrong with your brother and sister?” She was becoming defensive.

“Well, no,” Rachel sheepishly replied, “they’re all right. It’s just . . . I just don’t think this meeting is right for them, being younger than me, you know.”

Her mother’s expression began to wise up. “No Rachel, I think there’s more to this than you’re admitting.”

Rachel’s mother was right to a degree. The group was an important part of Rachel’s social identity outside of home. It was her personal “space” — one Rachel was understandably reluctant to share with her family. Rachel’s mother needed to learn to be sensitive to this fact, and to learn to ask before invading her social space. All in all, the move toward greater social independence is healthy for you. Someday you’ll be living on your own, choosing your own friends, studies, jobs, vacations, and hobbies. The experience and step-by-step independence you develop now is essential for the coming phases of life.



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- What kind of things happen that make you feel especially sad or happy?
- What sort of activities do you enjoy more when you are feeling up?
- What do you do to help yourself survive the down times?
- Why is it important to not make big decisions when you are feeling down or extremely happy?
- What do your parents do that invades your personal space?
- What do you need to do to help your parents understand your need for privacy?



FOR TEEN EYES ONLY

You will likely find that adolescents, including yourself, tend to analyze almost everything they were taught as children. Kids usually grow up using the values instilled in them by their parents. If their parents are prejudiced against other races, chances are their children will be prejudiced also. If their parents express faith in God, it's likely that their children will, too. If their parents value fine cars (or football, liquor, snow skiing, gourmet food, or any number of other things), chances are the kids will also desire those pleasures.

In the teenage years, you will find yourself completely re-evaluating the concepts and values you learned while growing up. This period of reassessment is very likely accompanied by feelings of insecurity and uneasiness. No surprise! Just when you thought you knew what was true and untrue, right and wrong, the facts become blurry. Your sense of peace and happiness undergoes a massive shake-up, and you feel like confusion reigns in your life.

Victoria is a high school girl who comes to our Kanakuk sports camps each summer. She's incredibly motivated, content, and enthusiastic about life, but it was not always this way. Listen to her story:

My parents are wonderful. As I grew up, they've loved me, shared their dreams with me, and gave me the chance to do all sorts of extracurricular activities. I knew what I believed about God, about sex, about morals. I even knew what career I wanted to pursue.

When I hit my sophomore year in high school, all that changed. I suddenly found myself resisting my parent's values. I stopped going to church. I started reading books about strange ideas. I discovered heavy metal rock. My school grades went to the ground floor. I found new friends, wild friends — the kind I would never have been attracted to before. My motivation and dreams for competitive swimming evaporated.

Along with all the questions I was asking, I felt this terrible unhappiness. I cried a lot.

I'd spend hours in my room just staring at the walls. I even thought about suicide, though I'd never actually do it. My parents were worried about me, really worried. In fact, they even sent me to a counselor, but nothing anyone could do helped.

That school year seemed like it was never going to end, but as the months passed, I found myself thinking again about what I believed as a child. It's like, I needed that chance to go outside the comfortable little world I was raised in, and just see what I really thought about life.

Gradually, I started coming out of my room. I lost interest in those wild friends. I talked to my coach about rejoining the swim team. I even started going back to church again.

The best part is that along with this "re-entry" I also experienced that former peace and contentment returning to me. I felt like I'd spent a year in the desert, and finally I was coming back home, but I was coming home by my own choice. Not because I had to. It was my own decision.

As a kid, you tend to take things at face value. Life seems pretty simple. As you move toward being an adult, you will naturally question and reassess the ideas you learned growing up. Confusion will periodically seem to reign in your life — a consequence of this reassessment, but don't lose hope. Reassessment is, all in all, a very important process. Reassessment is how the

values you grew up with actually become your OWN personal values. Without this process, you'll be simply living your parent's values. Only as you reassess can you actually make them uniquely yours and become your own unique person.