



## Developmental Characteristics of Teens

This document describes developmental characteristics of adolescents during the teen years.

Teens learn differently due to their physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development. Knowing these general characteristics will help leaders to reach, teach, love, and understand them.

### Characteristics of Teens

- Physical
  - Exhibit large differences in physical milestones.
    - Boys are hitting the age where they start to grow rapidly.
    - Girls' growth is starting to slow down.
  - May have big appetites.
  - Require more sleep and may even show sleepiness during the day.
  - Are developing coordination, both mentally and physically, making them capable of complex learning.
- Cognitive
  - Are becoming independent thinkers and doers.
  - Show an increasing ability to reason, make educated guesses, and think more abstractly.
  - Are extremely visual and good at multi-tasking.
  - Prefer to learn on an “as needed” basis, not requiring all information at once since information is available through technology instantly.
  - Begin to set their own goals for the future, taking other opinions into account but making their own decisions.
  - Begin to understand the consequences of their actions (not just immediate, but long term).
  - Use strategies to search for, use, and compare information from multiple sources.
  - Research and fact-check their teachers, leaders, and even parents.
- Emotional
  - Are in a unique stage of life, full of change and adjustment.
  - View friends and relationships as very important to them and have a desire to fit in.
  - Are beginning to compare themselves to their peers.
  - Want to be treated like adults but may act like children.
  - Are beginning to show signs of wanting independence from parents.
  - Can be incredibly fake but will only listen to someone who is real.
  - Feel overwhelmed by the pace at which life moves.
  - Feel pressure to conform to standards promoted by social media and their peers.
  - Are extremely busy juggling academics, sports, jobs, family, and social interaction.
  - Often struggle with loneliness and depression possibly from the decrease of personal interactions and increased use of technology, according to counselors.
  - Are almost totally self-focused, yet they express concern about causes which deal with human equality, racism, and social justice.

- Spiritual
  - Are making critical decisions about the kind of person they are going to be.
  - Are searching for the truth and often look to social media and internet for answers.
  - Look for authenticity and prefer to hear valuable, transparent speakers and teachers who share personal experiences.
  - Are learning where their giftings are and have a desire to develop and use their gifts and talents.
  - May be at a stage where they doubt the reliability and authority of Scripture that was fundamentally recognized by past generations.
  - Are a part of a generation where there is declining church attendance.
  - Can greatly benefit from having a mentor outside of their immediate family and friends.