

The Teen Mind and Body

for adults

The teen years are times of rapid change and growth. Because they are older and bigger than children, they are often lumped into the adult category, and as a result, they can be overlooked in the grief process.

So they are no longer a child, but not quite an adult. Just where do they fit in? And how many times have you or your teen said to each other, “You just don’t understand!” Well, you are both right. There are physiological (the body) and neurological (the brain) differences going on during the teen years that put them in a category of their own. Check these out.

THE TEEN

Brain

- Grey matter (thinking part of the brain) experiences huge growth spurt
- Frontal cortex (reasoning, planning, judgment, impulse control) not fully developed until age 23-26
- Ability to take in, process, organize and understand information not fully developed
- Ability to judge situations, people and behaviors not developed (teens may experiment with risky behaviors and make poor decisions not considering the consequences)
- Less balanced behavior and decision-making
- Rely more on the amygdale (portion of the brain that releases gut reactions)

Body

- Physical growth spurts
- Puberty—changes in hormones
- Sexual development
- More sleep needed

THE ADULT

Brain

- Grey matter developed
- Frontal cortex fully developed
- Able to take in, process, organize and understand information
- Able to distinguish and judge risky behaviors, people and situations and weigh the consequences of each
- More balanced behavior and decision-making
- Rely more on frontal cortex (portion of the brain responsible for reasoning, judgment and impulse control)

Body

- Fully grown
- Hormones more balanced
- Sexual development complete
- Not as much sleep needed

Even though teens may look like adults, there are differences that separate them. The experience of grief can be very different for teens than it is for adults. They may grieve in similar ways, but you and your teen both need to understand that due to age and development, you do not have the same tools—the life experience, support, resources, maturity and coping mechanisms.