

# YOU & YOUR TEENAGER



for  
Women

*Teenagers are not children but they are not adults either. They mature and their brains grow a lot between 12 and 20. The “unfinished” parts of the brain aid good decision making, self awareness, impulse control, and control of emotions. Teens still have a lot to learn about problem solving, controlling emotions, understanding how others think of them, and assessing the motives of others.*

**These things are typical of young people as they grow from ages 13 to 18. Which changes do you see in your teenager?**

- increased independence from family, especially for social activities
- dramatic physical changes brought on by puberty
- dramatic mood changes brought on by puberty
- friends and the need for acceptance by friends are very important
- interest in dating and relationships grows
- more likely to challenge you when you try to impose rules
- wants more freedom but is not taking on more responsibility
- they may not always make good choices about friends and risky behaviour such as drugs
- may be embarrassed to be seen with a parent in public, may value friends more than family
- obsessed with own appearance, clothes, music, gadgets, etc. and the money to get them
- does things impulsively without thinking through consequences

**Each child is a unique person. Pick six words to describe your teenager’s personality to someone who does not know him or her (e.g., stubborn, kind, lazy, quiet, smart, moody).**

**When a teenager has seen violence at home, she may feel and think things like this...**

- she may feel responsible for taking care of younger brothers and sisters, to keep them safe
- she may be embarrassed by her family and reluctant to bring friends home
- she may try and intervene in violent incidents to protect her mother
- she may fantasize about leaving home or actually leave home
- she may blame you for not protecting her or siblings
- she may adopt unhealthy coping strategies such as drug use or early sexual activity
- she may have difficulty establishing healthy dating relationships or avoid intimacy
- she may start to stereotype males as perpetrators and females as victims

### What your teenager may be feeling now

- relief** – relief the abuser is out of your life  
– relief the abuser is out of her life and away from younger siblings
- anger** – anger that you did not leave sooner  
– anger that you did not protect yourself from abuse  
– anger if you did not protect her from maltreatment  
– anger that her whole life has been turned upside down  
– anger that her teenage issues have been swept aside by focus on violence
- worry** – worry you might go back to him, especially if you have reconciled before  
– worry you might start dating a new abuser, if you have done that before
- concern** – concern that you are sad and upset  
– concern about the well-being of younger brothers and sisters
- vengeful** – fantasizing about taking revenge against abuser
- confusion** – confused by how to re-assume role of “child” after being a caretaker

**These feelings and beliefs are all normal reactions by teenagers to an abnormal situation. How do you think your teenager is feeling and thinking now?**

### What you may be feeling about your teenager...

- confusion** ...about why she is angry at you
- hurt** ...if she blames you for all her problems
- frustration** ...if she is not following house rules and seems out of control
- anger** ...if challenges to your authority take on abusive qualities
- guilt** ...if you think her problems are related to the violence

### Explaining the violence to your teenager

Children of this age can understand the “bigger picture” of woman abuse and you can have a frank discussion about what you were thinking and feeling. Spend most of the discussion, however, on how she was thinking and feeling. Let her express her anger or other emotions and her worries for the future. This may not be pleasant to hear but let her talk. This is a worrisome age, even at the best of times. Teenagers need stability and guidance, a firm base from which to experiment. Reassure her that you will be her base.

### How to help your teenager

- tell her and show her you love her, and do not blame her for anything that happened
- let her know you are there to talk when she is ready
- take responsibility for the decision to leave (if you and your partner have separated)
- don't rely on her for emotional support: seek out friends, family or professionals for that
- negotiate clear rules and consequences that are appropriate for her age
- review the coping strategies on page 42 and encourage healthy strategies
- take care of yourself: she needs you



The Ontario Women's Directorate has “tip sheets” for parents, to encourage healthy dating relationships in boys and girls:  
[www.ontariowomensdirectorate.gov.on.ca](http://www.ontariowomensdirectorate.gov.on.ca)