

SEPTEMBER 2017

Parenting teens who have chronic illnesses

By Jennifer Allen, PhD, and Kendra Parris, PhD, of the St. Jude Psychology Department

Finally – back home, off treatment. We can return to “normal.” Back to school, back to work... this is what we’ve been waiting for!

What if the transition home and being off treatment isn’t so easy? What if it’s filled with excitement paired with new worries and fears? Your child survived the unimaginable. All this other “life” stuff should be easy. But, how can you return to normal with everything you’ve gone through?

Milestones, like going to a slumber party, summer camp, learning to drive, dating, moving away to college, can be exciting for your teen but may make you scared and worried. How can you let your baby grow up and gain independence when you feel the need to protect your child from more harm? You’re not alone, and hopefully this article will help.

Raising your teen after illness

Parents of children with chronic medical illnesses, such as cancer, sickle cell anemia, and many others, struggle with how to help their children just be teenagers. Raising a teenager is hard enough without the added stress of a medical condition.

For any child, the teen years are a time of rapid change. In fact, changes in biology, thinking and social functioning are some of the main features of the teen years. Puberty causes a lot of physical growth and physical changes in teens. They begin to think in more complex and abstract ways and to look at things from different perspectives. They gain empathy and the ability to reason and to think about consequences.

Changes in social roles can also occur. Teens might gain more responsibilities and decision-making power within the family. In the community, they might be granted the right to drive, vote and work.

It is common for teens to have increased conflict with and emotional distance from parents. They spend more time with friends and have a desire to experiment. These normal teen experiences do not always lead

to problems. Most teenagers progress through this stage without any big issues.

The timing of these changes in teens and how strong those changes are varies widely. But, almost every teen will experience these same changes.

Dealing with teen changes

The changes can be alarming for parents, especially those who have helped their child through a serious medical condition. Being the parent of a child with a chronic illness can alter who you are as a person, spouse and parent. Milestones that in the past may have been exciting now might make you scared, worried or confused.

As a parent, you can have a positive effect on the ways your teen handles

these changes. For example, you can help your teenager develop self-awareness and confidence. You can help build a work-together relationship with your teen and find chances for your teen to take part in decisions. It is important to be involved in your teenager’s world. You should attend school activities and eat meals together. Try going on walks together or find a joint interest or hobby. Talk openly and listen. Try not to interrupt your talking teen. Prompt instead of correct, and encourage them to problem solve. Involve your teenager in creating rules and consequences, and model healthy relationships in your personal life. Lastly, try to encourage your teenager’s ideas and natural abilities.

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Please don’t share snacks in clinics

Sometimes patients must go without food and drink before having anesthesia or sedation for surgery or other procedures. This is called NPO, which means “nothing by mouth” in Latin. Patients with full stomachs are at risk for getting food or liquid in their lungs, which can lead to pneumonia or other serious health problems.

If your child has followed NPO guidelines in the past, you know how difficult it can be for children to wait so long for food and drinks. If you carry snacks for your child into the clinic waiting rooms, please remember not to offer any food to other children without first checking with their parents. If a child who is NPO eats even a bite or two, that child’s surgery or procedure will be delayed or cancelled. If the parents or staff do not know about the child sharing a

snack, that child’s health could be in danger.

NPO guidelines are important for the health and safety of all patients. Help us keep every St. Jude patient safe.

Medicine Room doors locked during the night

To provide a more secure patient care area after hours, the entrance to the Medicine Room is now locked from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. every day. If you need to enter the Medicine Room during these times:

- Go to the Medicine Room door,
- Use the phone behind you to dial extension 2441, and
- The staff will unlock the door for you.

Do you need a changing table for an older child or teen?

An adult-sized changing table is now offered in one of the family restrooms in the Chili’s Care Center near Patient Registration and Assessment and Triage. It is room I-1101.

This changing table can support up to 440 pounds and includes a safety rail. You can adjust the table height using the remote control.

If you need help finding the restroom with the adult changing table, ask a staff member in the Chili’s Care Center.



Talking about Medicines

What you should know about herbal products

By Shane Cross, PharmD, Pharmaceutical Services

Herbal products are extracts that are usually taken from the roots and leaves of plants. They have been used for centuries in some cultures and are becoming more and more popular in the United States. Even so, herbal products are not the same as medicines or vitamins and minerals.

Here is an important point to remember about herbal products: Unlike medicines, herbals do not need approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) before they can be put on the market. This means that the producers can sell a product without proving how well it works or how safe it is. Unfortunately, many people believe that because herbals are "natural" they are also safe. This may or may not be true, and it depends a lot on the specific herbal product.

There also might be possible drug interactions between herbal products and the medicines your child takes. Some herbals can change the way certain medicines work in the body and can cause unexpected side effects.

Be sure to check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking any herbal products or giving them to your child.

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Typical teen outcomes

The following are typical outcomes for teens that show the growth and changes that we would expect to see:

- An increased sense of autonomy. This means they do more things on their own and make decisions. They do not rely on their parents for personal needs.
- A refined identity. They have much more self-awareness, knowing who they are or who they want to be.
- Greater intimacy and sometimes sex in relationships. This includes having more emotional, mature and complex relationships.
- Decisions made about future goals. They focus more on education and careers.

It can be frightening for parents to watch their teens go through these changes. If you find yourself or your child struggling with the common

hurdles of the teen years, seek support. These are some people who can help:

- Your child's primary care doctor
- The St. Jude medical and psycho-social teams
- The St. Jude Psychology Clinic staff (901-595-3581)

When disease and treatments slow growth

Your child's medical and treatment history may have caused physical, mental and emotional limits that set your child apart from typical teens. If you are a parent of a teenager with these types of limits, look for a future article from the Psychology Clinic about how to best support your child during the teen years. If you want to talk about it now, call the Psychology Clinic at 901-595-3581 for help with your family.

St. Jude Parents is published on the first of each month by Family-Centered Care Services and Biomedical Communications. Your questions and comments are important to us. **We want to print advice and tips from St. Jude parents to other St. Jude parents.**

To share your ideas or to receive this newsletter by email, please call or email Alicia Huettel, RN, MSN, at 901-595-5453 (parents_newsletter@stjude.org) or Lois Young (lois.young@stjude.org). To subscribe to an online version of this newsletter or to learn more about *St. Jude Parents*, visit www.stjude.org/parents-newsletter. St. Jude is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

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ATTENTION: If you speak another language, assistance services, free of charge, are available to you. Call 1-866-278-5833 (TTY: 1-901-595-1040).

ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 1-866-278-5833 (TTY: 1-901-595-1040).

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