

[Click here to buy](#)



TEENAGE GUYS

Exploring Issues Adolescent Guys Face and Strategies to Help Them



Steve Gerali

ZONDERVAN™
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN 49530 USA

ZONDERVAN.COM/
AUTHORTRACKER

Youth Specialties
www.youthspecialties.com



Teenage Guys: Exploring Issues Adolescent Guys Face and Strategies to Help Them

Copyright © 2006 by Steve Gerali

Youth Specialties products, 300 South Pierce Street, El Cajon, CA 92020 are published by Zondervan, 5300 Patterson Avenue Southeast, Grand Rapids, MI 49530.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gerali, Steve.

Teenage guys : exploring the issues that adolescent guys face and the strategies to help them / by Steve Gerali.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-10: 0-310-26985-7 (pbk.)

ISBN-13: 978-0-310-26985-4 (pbk.)

1. Church work with teenagers. 2. Teenage boys. 3. Adolescence. I. Title.

BV4447.G46 2006

259'.23--dc22

2006000896

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible: New International Version* (North American Edition). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other (except for brief quotations in printed reviews) without the prior permission of the publisher.

Web site addresses listed in this book were current at the time of publication. Please contact Youth Specialties via e-mail (YS@YouthSpecialties.com) to report URLs that are no longer operational and replacement URLs if available.

Creative Team: Dave Urbanski, Laura Gross, Heather Haggerty, Janie Wilkerson, and Mark Novelli

Cover design by Burnkit

Printed in the United States

CONTENTS

Adolescent Guys: Never a Dull Moment

Section 1: Male Adolescence

1.1	Understanding Male Adolescence	18
	Storm and Stress of Male Adolescence	19
	Age Ranges Within Adolescence	22
	Developmental Tasks	25
	A Holistic Approach to Adolescence	26
1.2	What Guys Need	31

Section 2: The Teenage Guy's Body (Physical Development)

2.1	The Male Body	40
	Adolescent Guys Are Very Body Conscious	41
	Fascination with Function	42
	When Puberty Strikes	43
	Manifestations of Male Puberty	45
2.2	Secondary Sex Characteristics	47
	The Growth Spurt	51
2.3	Primary Sex Characteristics	60
	The Time Has Come...	61
	Internal Reproductive Development	66

Section 3: The Teenage Guy's Sexuality (Sexual Identity Development)

3.1	Guys and Sex	74
	Testosterone: Superhuman Hormone or Poison Potion?	74
	Identity and Messages of Virility	79
	Sex on the Brain	90
	Sex as a Rite of Passage	92
3.2	Guys and Homosexuality	95
	For Clarity's Sake	97
	Getting on the Same Page	97
	Understand the Dilemma	99
	Coming Out	101
	Acts of Desperation	103
	Destructive Behavior	105
	Helping a Homosexual Teenage Guy	106

Section 4: The Teenage Guy's Emotions (Emotional Development)

4.1	Emotional Myths that Influence Guys	112
	Emotional Development	114
	Myths about Emotions	115
4.2	Emotionally Abandoned Guys	124
	Being a Father to the Fatherless	124
	Practical Theology	126
4.3	Anger, Depression, and Suicide	136
	The Triple Jeopardy Effect	136
	Depression	140
	Suicide	145
	Why Do Teenage Guys Attempt and Commit Suicide?	146
4.4	Aggression and Violence	153
	Raising Cain	156
	Emotional and Psychological Problems	162

Section 5: The Teenage Guy's Mind (Intellectual Development)

5.1	A Guy's Brain	166
	Brain Growth	166
	Communication and Brain Difference	171
	Spatial Function	174
	Other "Guy Brain" Functions	175
5.2	From Concrete to Idealism	177
	Stage #1—Concrete	177
	Stage #2—Abstract	182
	Stage #3—Ideal	188
5.3	Learning Problems	191
	Detecting a Learning Problem	194
	Ministry and Mentoring Tips	195

Section 6: The Teenage Guy's Family and Friends (Social Development)

6.1	Male Identity Development	200
	Biological Factors	201
	Masculine Identity Theory	202
	Father Wound	206
	Personal Identity	207

6.2	How Relationships Shape Guys	211
	Task #1—Identity Development	212
	Task #2—Intimacy Development	214
6.3	Guys and Family	233
	You Can't Choose Your Relatives	234
	Guys and Fathers	235
	Guys and Mothers	243
6.4	Rites of Passage: Blessing	249
	The Importance of Rites of Passage	251

Section 7: The Teenage Guy's Spirituality (Faith Formation)

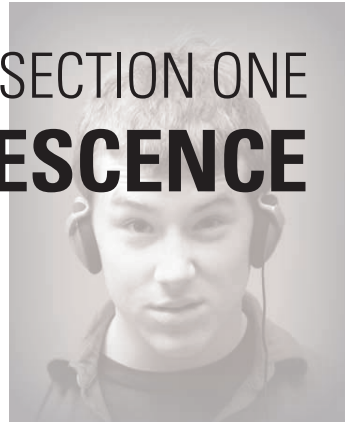
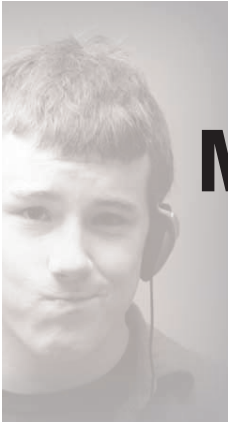
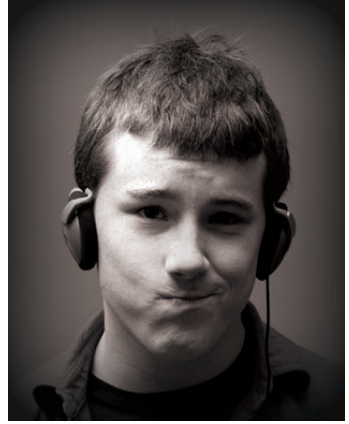
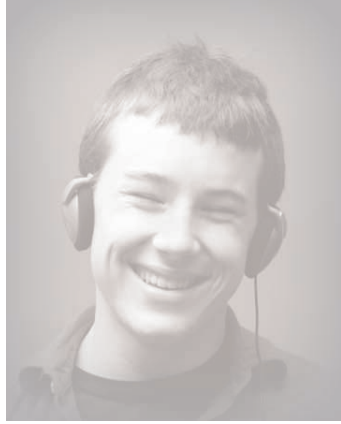
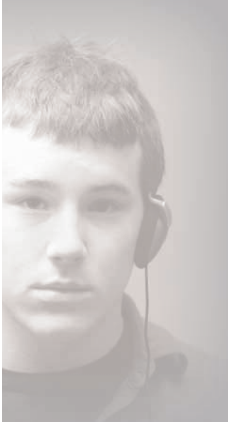
7.1	Spirituality	260
	Spirituality and Masculinity	261
	Spirituality Isn't Male or Female	266
	Faith Formation	267
	Archetypes of Faith Formation	270
	Stages of Spiritual Development	271
	Guys Have Spiritual Needs	277

	Appendix A: More on Guys' Physiology	279
--	--------------------------------------	-----

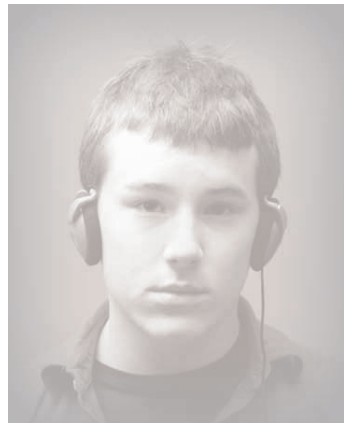
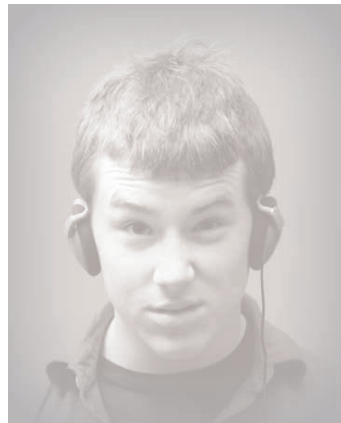
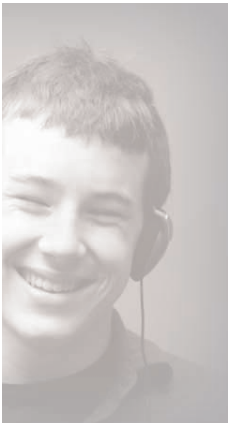
	Appendix B: Physical Problems Adolescent Guys Face	285
--	--	-----

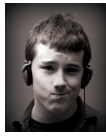
	Appendix C: Guys and Sexually Transmitted Diseases	301
--	--	-----

Notes



SECTION ONE
MALE ADOLESCENCE





1.1

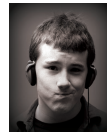
UNDERSTANDING MALE ADOLESCENCE

I'd just finished speaking to parents of teenagers at a church-sponsored seminar when a very determined, seemingly panic-stricken mother hightailed it down the aisle to reach me before anyone else could. I knew she was stressed because she nearly plowed over some people on the way. When she reached my side, she looked fatigued and her voice was many decibels louder than normal. (I wondered for a moment if she thought I was deaf.) But I soon discovered this dear woman's plight.

"I need help!" she blurted before disclosing to me that she was the mother of four boys—ages two to 13. (It immediately began to make sense to me.) She described how her oldest son used to be a sweet little boy, but now he was *changing*. She drew parallels between him and her two-year-old, describing the many similarities between a child in the terrible twos and a child in the—her term for it—"terrible teens." She bombarded me with more questions than I could answer. Finally, she said, "I don't understand how teenage boys work; I wish my boy came with a user's manual."

"So you need to know how your teenage boy is wired?" I asked jokingly.

She quickly affirmed my observation and added that she was concerned that his wiring may be malfunctioning. This mother wanted her teenage son's user's manual to include an explanation of his wiring, tips on how to detect if and when the wiring goes bad, and instructions for how to rewire her son, if possible.



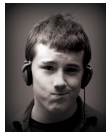
Guys are wired differently than girls from the beginning. But when adolescence sets in, it can appear as though their wiring has gone bad. In reality, it may be just a normal phase of growth. While they don't come with user's manuals, these days we have a better understanding of what makes a guy uniquely masculine and how to help him navigate through the storm and stress of adolescence and on into manhood.

STORM AND STRESS OF MALE ADOLESCENCE

The science of adolescence is a relatively new phenomenon, but adolescence has been recognized—although misunderstood—throughout history. The earliest records we have about adolescent boys are observations Aristotle made about the young adolescent males who were his protégés. He saw them as egocentric, idealistic, passionate, quick-tempered and easily angered, impulsive, overly optimistic, gullible, lacking self-control, and driven by their sexual desires. He also observed the strong, intimate connectedness—or brotherhood—they formed with their friends, which he noted was unlike any other period in a man's life (throughout childhood or maturity). He recognized that they were developing cognitively and entering into more advanced thinking stages. This led him to say, “They think they know everything.”¹ Aristotle believed that adolescent boys “carry everything too far: they love to excess, they hate to excess—and so in all else.”²

He wasn't too far off the mark in his observations. And they shaped Aristotle's instructional approach with adolescent males—one that fostered ethical and moral choice and self-determination. But while these distinctives were recognized, it wasn't until the Industrial Age that adolescence emerged as a distinct, formative life stage.

In 1902 developmental psychologist G. Stanley Hall published *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology,*



POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO THE EARLIER ONSET OF PUBERTY IN GUYS IN THE 21ST CENTURY:

View 1: We are healthier than the generations before us. We are more aware of diet and exercise and have made our children more aware of the same issues. Medical advancements have also put us in a more healthy position. This may allow the human body to develop at a less hindered rate, making puberty come earlier than in past eras.

View 2: While we may be healthier, we scientifically alter our food to preserve it longer or enhance its growth and qualities. Yet these chemicals may affect the onset of puberty, accelerating it at an unhealthy rate before its intended time.

View 3: Puberty is triggered by the release of hormones through the endocrine system that is primarily controlled by the hypothalamus and pituitary gland in the brain. Some believe a child's brain is stimulated to interact as an adult in certain situations, through

CONTINUED >

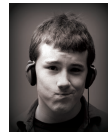
Sex, Crime, Religion and Education. Hall became known as the “father of adolescence” because he identified the developmental issues that create a transition from childhood to adulthood. He recognized and popularized adolescence as a formative stage in the developmental life span of an individual from ages 11 to 22.

Prior to Hall's pioneering work, the world viewed people as children until they could sire children of their own. The physiological phenomenon of puberty immediately made a boy a man. Hall theorized that the physical factors of puberty started a series of physical, psychological, and sociological changes that distinguished passive, effeminate boys into more assertive men. While not always evidenced outwardly, this internal aggressive shift in the makeup of boys into men was what Hall identified as “*Sturm und Drang*” or *storm and stress*.

The onset of this transitioning period was marked by puberty. (As a basic point of clarification, puberty is *not* adolescence. It's the event that marks the beginning of the developmental life span called “adolescence.”) In Hall's era, puberty often began around the age of 11. Hall believed adolescence ended with the autonomy of the individual. This was marked by adult-like accomplishments such as marriage, starting a family, financial independence, acts of bravery and/or leadership, pursuing a career, and so on. Hall believed this most likely occurred around the age of 22 or 23. When a boy successfully navigated through the storm and stress of adolescence, he emerged at the other end a stable, autonomous man.

If we applied Hall's lines of definition to adolescence today, we'd have some problems. Puberty is starting earlier for most guys. They still begin puberty later than girls do, but most guys begin physically changing at age nine or 10. And at the other end, at ages 22 and 23, most people aren't ready or able to be financially autonomous yet (due to various

1.1 UNDERSTANDING MALE ADOLESCENCE



socioeconomic factors). They're not settled into their careers, nor are they ready to start a family.

Adult behaviors blur even more with technological advancements, leaving very little room for rites of passage in Western culture. Guys engage in video games and have access to adult-rated DVDs and on-line adult Web sites that expose them to adult sexual behaviors. They own and operate cell phones, computers, and personal handheld computers that give them the privileges and freedoms of adults without the usual responsibilities. Many parents fail to exercise parental controls over this technology. Or worse, even if the parents do implement some controls, teenage guys can find ways to get around them because they're more techno-savvy than their parents. As a result, teenagers are experiencing adult behaviors earlier, but they're still hindered from autonomous adult living.

In short, if we followed Hall's definition, then adolescence would run from ages nine to 35, give or take a few years. So for all practical purposes, today's social science community recognizes the years of adolescence as ranging from age 11 or 12 to age 22 or 23. We will use this timeline throughout the book (see fig. 1):

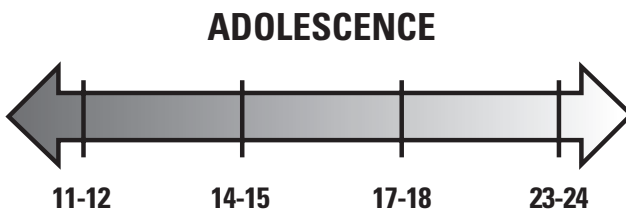
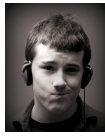


Figure 1

CONTINUED >

media exposure and life events. For example, kids watch prime-time television programs and are exposed to hours of adult themes and problem solving, whether it's healthy or dysfunctional. Kids are also given adult responsibilities (such as childcare for younger siblings, grocery shopping, and so on) because their parents work. Kids may also experience forms of independence due to shifting family structures and divorce. All of these activities prematurely stimulate areas of the brain toward more advanced functions, which may also trigger the release of growth hormones and result in the early onset of puberty.

View 4: There may be a combination of all of the above. While these factors may be influential, there is no conclusive evidence to substantiate any single factor.



AGE RANGES WITHIN ADOLESCENCE

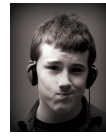
It's easier for us to see how guys develop if we break down the timeline into three distinct age groupings.

Early Adolescence

Between ages 11 and 14 is technically termed *early adolescence* (see fig. 2). These are the middle school or junior high years, and this is often the time when guys begin to experience rapid growth in stature. Junior high guys are full of seemingly reckless energy, and parents and youth workers sometimes wonder if they have any real cognitive ability because they can be rude, obnoxious, and lack appropriate boundaries. At this stage they are becoming very *self-aware*, and they're learning about who they are. Since identity is being formulated, they tend to mimic societal norms regarding gender roles and masculinity, often with an awkward reluctance and lack of confidence.

On the other hand, early adolescent guys have profound moments. They can often surprise us with clarity of thought and wisdom that seems strange for their years. Yet they still fluctuate between little-boy and adolescent behavior. This is especially evidenced in their play. They still enjoy their little-boy toys and games, but they wouldn't be caught dead playing with them. It's also evidenced in their emotions. They still have a tenderness that is untainted by the bravado that will be internalized during middle adolescence.

Becoming more aware of girls but not being sure they like the opposite sex yet; discovering sexual pleasure through masturbation; having a limited attention span; not wanting to be around parents or family; learning that crying must be done in secret or not done at all; attempting to be funny or gross; roughhousing and swearing in front of their friends as an act of manly independence; and a budding spiritual sensitivity all mark this stage in a young teenage guy's life.

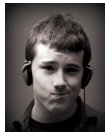


Middle Adolescence

Middle adolescence occurs between 14 and 17 years of age (see fig. 2). The high school years. These guys take on a new image as their stature begins to fill out, and this makes them much more *body aware*. And, depending on how their development progresses, they become more confident or less confident about their physical appearance. Regardless, most middle adolescent guys can find something they believe is abnormal about their physical appearance.

Most senior high guys develop a bravado that they'll eventually internalize as their masculine identity. This is defined by strength—both physical and emotional (meaning the suppression of emotion)—and status. It's also accompanied by a sense of invincibility and a heightened desire for adventure. (This feeling will become even stronger in the next stage.) High school guys often present themselves as detached from emotional situations, and they also lack confidence to make solid decisions. This often puts them behind girls their same age, resulting in the girls taking more control and leadership roles. Yet guys in middle adolescence become more confident in their cognitive abilities. (Have you ever wondered why senior high guys think they know everything?) While this age range develops new confidences, it feels unstable overall.

Hanging out with friends; playing hours of computer and video games; attempting new and more daring stunts on a skateboard, snowboard, or surfboard; dreaming about the perfect car and girlfriend (and trying to acquire both); worrying about future college plans; and attempting to discern and own spiritual truths mark this stage in a guy's life.



Late Adolescence

Late adolescence occurs between ages 18 and 23 (see fig. 2). A guy in this age range begins to personally define himself as a man; but because he must let go of childhood—more specifically, adolescence—many guys have a difficult time with this identity transition. Girls this age will more easily define themselves as adult women; but many young men want to stay kids a while longer. Ask any guy this age, and he'll tell you he's not a man!

Late adolescents' play becomes more adventurous, and their toys become more expensive and powerful. They're less inhibited about their bodies and more obsessed with defining them. They become more aware that they need to be responsible adults, which often means taking on some form of personal or group leadership position. Late-adolescent guys desperately seek out, consciously or subconsciously, strong male mentors. Many college-age males will attempt to identify with male role models as a frame of reference regarding their own manhood (this occurs more during this stage of adolescence than in the previous ones). They also become more aware of the deficiencies of their own fathers. If their father-son relationship is lacking a strong emotional connectedness, then this results in a *woundedness* that's become so popularized in masculine-identity literature.

This stage in a guy's life is marked by the internalization of values; strong male bonding; sexual awareness, desire, lust, and hormonal overdrive; a noted attentiveness to future planning; more intimate dating with the goal of mate selection; and at times a greater desire to be well-rounded ethically, morally, and spiritually.

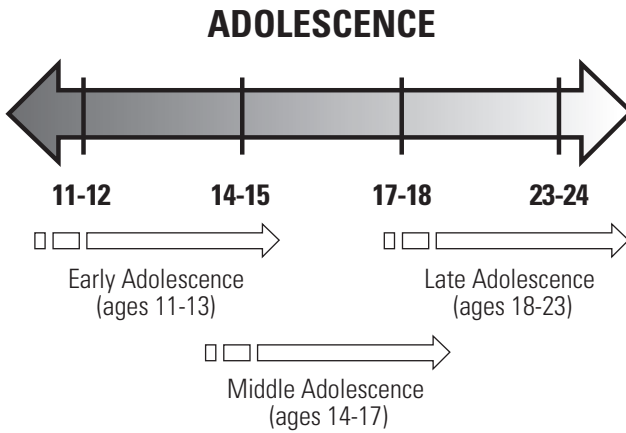
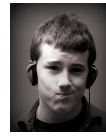


Figure 2

DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

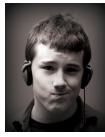
In each age and stage of adolescence, a guy must accomplish certain developmental tasks. A developmental task is the formation of attitudes, values, behaviors, and skills that will transition him from boyhood into manhood. It's the process of formulating a proper masculine identity. Developmental tasks become the series of hoops a boy jumps through on his way to becoming a man. These tasks often root themselves in changes in physiology, cognition, social expectations, and identity.

Nancy Cobb, author of *Adolescence: Continuity, Change, and Diversity*, states: "Because our sense of ourselves comes in part from our awareness of how others see us, cultural norms give shape to personal standards. Biological maturation contributes more heavily to some tasks, such as adjusting to an adult body, whereas cultural norms contribute more to others, such as developing social skills."³

DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS OF ADOLESCENCE

Robert Havighurst coined the phrase *developmental task* and identified the following as tasks of adolescence:

- Forming mature relationships with peers—same and opposite gender.
- Adopting masculine social roles.
- Accepting one's body.
- Achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults.
- Preparing for marriage and family life.
- Preparing for career and becoming self-supporting.
- Acquiring values that guide one's behavior.
- Exhibiting socially responsible behavior.



MALE YOUTH WORKER TIP

Be quick to notice and verbally affirm any character qualities that distinguish a guy as a qualitative, God-honoring man. Take him out for a soda and when you're one-on-one, disclose your agenda of affirmation regarding his qualities. A conversation like that becomes a *coming of age* moment for a guy.

PROGRAMMING TIP

Plan a variety of *rites of passage* rituals or ceremonies to mark the progression from early-, middle-, and late-adolescent boyhood into manhood. This gradual advancement will give your male students a more stable perspective on and greater readiness for manhood. (Chapter 6.4 is devoted solely to rites of passage.)

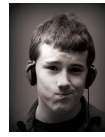
As a guy encounters these tasks in adolescence, it becomes essential for parents and youth workers to help him navigate through them. Although developmental tasks are somewhat sequential and dependent upon each other, many of them are worked on throughout adolescence. Each guy is different and navigates through these tasks at his own pace. Therefore, it's more important to know about the tasks of adolescence, rather than attaching them to a specific age in adolescence.

When a guy begins these tasks, we call this a *coming of age*. This is when a guy recognizes that he's crossed a line somewhere, leaving a part of childhood behind. Often, coming of age may be distinguished by an event, experience, conversation, or rite of passage. A *rite of passage* is a ritual or ceremony that marks the transition from childhood into adulthood. The Western culture has very few rites of passage for adolescent guys. The single most significant rite of passage may be the acquisition of a driver's license. Others may include graduation, voting in an election, and going to college, but these really don't affirm the shift of a child into manhood.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO ADOLESCENCE

Remember the mom who wanted a "user's guide" for her son? Well, she would have loved a holistic approach to the developmental process he's experiencing, which offers more information about each of the different dimensions that make up her son—and all people.

There are five specific dimensions to a person—biological (physical); affective (emotional); cognitive (intellectual); sociological (social), and spiritual (some refer to it as moral/ethical). This frazzled mom observed some physical changes in her son, but she didn't understand how those changes affected his identity. She needed to understand how her son was thinking, as well as what he was feeling. She also as-



essed him to be spiritually bankrupt because of his apathy, not realizing that he actually may have been spiritually on track, while his apathy was due to a sociological issue. Or maybe it wasn't an issue at all.

For now, I'll offer a quick overview of the dimensions. As we continue to examine how a guy is wired, we'll walk through each one in more detail throughout the remainder of the book.

The Biological/Physical Dimension

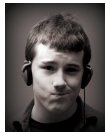
Except for the time between infancy and the toddler years, at no other time in the developmental process is a person's physiological change as dramatic as it is in adolescence. The process begins with *puberty* and ends in full *sexological* maturation. Guys experience many different physiological alterations that will ultimately affect their emotions, relationships, self-image, personality, and even their spirituality. When we examine this area, we'll discuss everything from the development of sex characteristics to the effects of testosterone on the psyche. We'll look at some myths and misconceptions about sexuality that the world and the church believe to be true. We'll also examine some physical problems and disorders that could affect a guy during adolescence.

The Affective/Emotional Dimension

Many books about raising a male child have been written with this dimension in mind. Guys are constantly bombarded with societal messages to suppress, ignore, or deny their feelings. This becomes very confusing for an adolescent guy because he's constantly running counter to the way he was wired. God created us in his image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). Being created like God means guys are created to be fully emotional. Thus, this frequently repressed dimension can lead to serious repercussions in the quality of a young man's life and relationships.

DISCLAIMER

"Normal development" is a relative term. The age spans and developmental process through which a guy changes are as unique to him as he is unique from everyone else. The breakdowns in this book are ballpark observations that experts have identified for centuries. If you believe your adolescent guy isn't developing normally, be patient—he may be a late bloomer. If you believe he's way outside the realm of the experts' observations, then consult an expert in adolescence.



THE BOOK OF PROVERBS INFORMS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF A GUY

The book of Proverbs is written from the perspective of an older man mentoring a younger man. The mentor continually helps the protégé see the effects of his alliances and relationships:

- Proverbs 1:15 (NASB)—
“My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path.”
- Proverbs 2:20 (NASB)—
“Walk in the way of good men, and keep to the paths of the righteous.”
- Proverbs 13:20 (NASB)—
“He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.”
- Proverbs 14:7 (NASB)—
“Leave the presence of a fool, or you will not discern words of knowledge.”
- Proverbs 18:24 (NASB)—
“A man of too many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”
- Proverbs 20:19b (NASB)—“Do not associate with a gossip.”

CONTINUED >

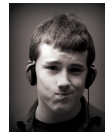
The Cognitive/Intellectual Dimension

We have come to understand that guys think differently than girls. Those differences are issues of perspective, many of which may have roots in cultural conditioning, genetics, or biblical values. We also know that, developmentally speaking, a junior high guy thinks differently than a senior high or college guy. Men move through an intellectual growth pattern. They go from being the concrete-thinking little boy to a mature-thinking grown man. In order to effectively assist guys through adolescence, we have to know how to assess where they are on an intellectual developmental grid.

The Sociological/Social Dimension

This area is where a guy’s sense of self is formed. He’ll challenge, internalize, shape, and mold his personal masculinity. His views of women will also be formed here, as he begins to understand his own gender better. He’ll begin to engage in adult-specific behaviors that he perceives as making him an adult male. Much of the input he receives will be from others—his friends, family, church, community, and so on.

An understanding of identity formation in the sociological dimension of an adolescent guy is critical. Too often youth workers *think* they understand this social dimension just because they hang out with kids. Helping a boy become a man requires more than just hanging out with him. While that relational aspect is critical in creating an authoritative voice in the kid’s life, it isn’t enough to deliberately shape his identity. Examination, observation, critical assessment, and sometimes modification of the sociological systems that shape a guy must be understood. This systems approach means we need to help guys understand the influences that their friends and family have on their identity. In other words, we can’t deal with the kid apart from the system.



The Spiritual or Moral/Ethical Dimension

This is the place where morals, values, and beliefs are formed. This is also where we'd deal with faith and spiritual formation. There has recently been an outpouring of Christian literature geared toward Christian men and their faith. Many organizations and denominations have also done an excellent job of informing a guy's spiritual development and needs.

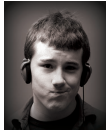
Despite this positive trend, there is still a problem in the trajectory of these teachings. Most of the literature on men's spirituality is written to address the problem of a lack of leadership in general and, more specifically, a lack of *spiritual* leadership. This can often create a narrow perspective that ignores the multifaceted characteristics of a man's relationship with God, as demonstrated by the many diverse archetypes of men that are found in Scripture. In an attempt to goad men into a single style of spiritual leadership, these well-meaning books create a "Christian Strongman Syndrome" that often spiritualizes myths about masculinity and makes sacred these capitalistic, Western concepts of manhood by harmonizing them with Scripture rather than drawing them from Scripture. In the long run, this can become a spiritual poison in the development of a young man's spiritual formation.

I encounter many guys who feel as though their spiritual lives are worthless because they're wired more as "wise men" or as "conciliators" rather than spiritual archetypes of "warriors" or "wild men." I talk to young guys who are troubled with the concept that every man must have a cause and rescue a maiden. This wounds the spiritual commitment of celibacy for these men. I've also seen late adolescents learn to dominate or intimidate others in the name of spiritual leadership, following the example of many of the spiritual "role models" who do the same—and all in the name of being a godly *man*.

CONTINUED >

- Proverbs 23:6 (NASB)—
"Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, or desire his delicacies."
- Proverbs 23:20 (NASB)—
"Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, or with gluttonous eaters of meat."
- Proverbs 24:1 (NASB)—
"Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them."
- Proverbs 27:17 (NASB)—
"Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."

And the list goes on...



TEENAGE**GUYS**

The Christian Strongman Syndrome ignores the tenderness of Jesus. It fails to honor the way he draws people to himself and how he is moved to weeping by their pain and brokenness. It only sees spiritual leadership as an in-your-face-get-out-of-my-way-cuz-I'm-right-and-empowered model. An understanding of the spiritual dimension of a guy's life can help us mentor men into deep spiritual relationships with others and with God.



1.2

WHAT GUYS NEED

While it may not appear to be true, teenage guys are incredibly complex creatures. They have passions and desires. They're moldable and pliable. They have a fresh curiosity about life, seeing it through eyes of wonder. At times they are reckless; at other times, they're reserved. They're free-spirited, fun, and exciting. They have hearts that can be courageously strong, yet easily broken. They're growing and developing to be men. You gotta love 'em! And if you do, you need to understand them and know what they need.

1. Guys need to be known and understood. We need to know them better than they know themselves. We need to know how they develop; what cultural influences are bombarding their lives and identities; how they think and feel; we need to know their fears and joys. We must know about adolescence and masculinity if we really want to meet this need in guys. Once we get this part figured out, then we have an adequate frame of reference or foundation to know and understand the individual guy. Guys are cautious about being known personally and deeply because they're conditioned to be in control and on guard. *Known* means *vulnerable*, and that becomes a great divide to cross. But it's worth the time and effort because guys desperately desire to be known. They want mentors who will value them enough to look at every fiber and flaw, every quality and characteristic. They want to know they're loved and valued for who they are, who they're becoming, and who they *will* become. They want to be known enough so you can help them see their blind spots and be their ally and confidant.



2. Guys need a close connection to God. Spirituality and masculinity are a lot like oil and water. It's difficult to get them to mix unless one or both are refined. Despite this daunting task, guys have a very deep internal spiritual sensitivity. It grows out of an instilled desire to know their Creator. Guys have always felt a connection to majesty—whether it's the majesty of nature or the majesty of imagination and creativity. This pull toward majesty is an internal desire to know the ultimate majesty—Jehovah God. Deep within they know he loves and adores them, he stands ready to complete and empower them, and he stirs everything within them that makes them whole men. Yet this spiritual sensitivity is fragile and can easily be extinguished by other things that compete to fill the place of awe in a guy's life. So he must be spiritually guided. He must explore and see the awe of God. He must taste for himself and see that God is good.

3. Guys need validation and empowerment as unique individuals. We must be very careful not to pigeonhole a guy. We need to realize that a universal label can make him feel as though he isn't a man or he cannot become one. To make one issue "every guy's battle" or journey or need robs him of his uniqueness. It also makes him a freak of nature if he isn't like every other guy. We need to understand there's no universal type of guy, but there may be commonalities. We need to help guys discover their unique talents, skills, abilities, characteristics, flaws, needs, weaknesses, and so on. Then we need to empower them to be all that God is making them to be.

4. Guys need community. Guys are clan-oriented. They bond and form intimate relationships differently than girls. They need multigenerational community. Within that community, they need the closeness of other men who act as a compass for their manhood. They need a gang of close male peers to sharpen them like iron sharpens iron. They need this tribe of guys to validate them as masculine. In the



context of community, they can see there are many different ways that men are men. They learn to celebrate the diversity of manliness. They need to see how they're normal, as well as the areas where they deviate from the norm. They need to experience the kind of heart connection they can have with other men that they can't get with women. If they cannot be intimate with the masculine on a tangible level, then they can never become intimate with an invisible God whom they perceive as being predominantly masculine in nature.

5. Guys need mentors. All throughout Scripture we see older men who come alongside younger men as mentors. David comes alongside Samuel and Jonathan. Paul comes alongside Timothy. Jesus comes alongside his 12 disciples. The entire book of Proverbs stands as an example of an older man who mentors a younger man in the ways of wisdom. Mentors proclaim to guys that they're valuable and worthy of investment. A mentor plays multiple roles in shaping everything from a guy's character to his thoughts and perceptions. Mentors fill the role of teacher, father, coach, confidant, example, refiner, encourager, shepherd, and on and on. A mentor imparts wisdom and looks for life's teachable moments in a guy. A mentor is concerned about the development of a guy's heart and character. A mentor empathizes with a guy and creates an intimate bond that lets a guy know he is known. A mentor allows the guy to struggle through tough issues without the fear of judgment. He loves at all times and doesn't walk out of a guy's life. He becomes the safe place a guy needs. A mentor models dependence upon and devotion to Christ. A mentor pushes the protégé into the presence of God.

6. Guys need to know how to work. Guys are raised in a culture that defines their value by their contribution. While we want to bust this ideology, we still want guys to learn how to work hard as an act of devotion toward and worship of Christ. Hard work builds responsibility. It helps a guy develop the dis-



ciplines he needs to do life fully. It generates in him a deep sense of purpose that ultimately plugs into the kingdom purpose of bringing glory to God, as he will hopefully learn a little bit later in life.

7. Guys need to lead and to follow. Leadership comes in many forms, from influence to position. In adolescence, guys are just beginning to develop some of their talents and abilities, such as leading. But leadership doesn't come naturally for everyone. Regardless, young men should learn to do both because at some point, guys will serve as an example to others—whether it's to their children or to others in their own peer group.

The United States, among many other nations, has been confronted with a crisis in leadership, especially in the church. Men aren't stepping up and taking the lead. This has created a knee-jerk reaction by many men to make leadership a masculine power trip. It's implied that men in leadership wield power, and we all know that "power makes the man." Thus, we have completely lost the concept of servant leadership. Today it's perceived as just a weak, less-than-masculine approach to influencing others. Yet this is the model Jesus demonstrates and demands that all men—and women—follow. A good leader serves. He knows when to take charge and when to relinquish the lead as others become empowered. Guys must take the responsibility of leadership, but they must also learn that a strong man is not a power monger but a servant.

A guy also needs to learn how to follow because he's constantly bombarded with messages that say being a man means he must be a rugged individual. This creates an internal mechanism that places the individual at the center of his universe. He grows up believing that his voice (his perceptions, beliefs, values, desires, passions, and so on) is the only authoritative voice that informs him. Even Christian guys learn this, and they take it a step further by spiritualizing their own voice, believing they have the only



line of direct contact with God. They claim God is the authoritative voice in their lives because he tells them, and they obey. Fortunately, God has chosen to provide many authoritative voices—from his Word to the church, a community of believers. When guys don't learn to follow, they ignore authority and rationalize—or worse, *spiritualize*—their self-centered ambitions and behaviors.

8. Guys need to play. I know a family with five boys who were all involved in different sports: soccer, basketball, baseball, track, and tennis. Life was one practice after another for this family. So you'd think that by the end of the day, these guys would've had enough play—you would think! I watched the brothers interact one day, and everything became a game for them. They constantly challenged each other: who could spit the farthest; who could eat dinner the fastest; who could eat the most; who could win back Mom's affection after they'd just made her angry, and so on. They were always at play. And they were just being guys—guys *need* to play.

Many theorists have picked up on this innate characteristic in men. They've labeled it as a need for the hunt, for competition, or for adventure. These needs play out in a single God-instilled, masculine characteristic—dominion. Follow the logic: in Genesis 1:28, God gives humankind dominion over the earth. He puts men and women at the top of the food chain. Conquest, competition, and control become a part of the DNA. These innate characteristics, instinctual to humankind but exemplified in guys, all influence a guy's need to play.

Guys learn to release their aggression in a healthy way during play. They learn depth of character by playing fair, learning teamwork, and prioritizing important human values, such as, "Winning isn't everything," or "It doesn't matter if you win or lose, but how you play the game." They learn how to be gracious losers or winners, how to manage their disappointments, how to evaluate their skills and abilities



and change themselves. They learn respect, control, strategy, and discipline while having a great time.

The world teaches guys that they should win at all costs. They learn to fight, kill, and destroy, either as descriptors of or as a form of fun. Now the idea of having *dominion over* something quickly becomes *domination, humiliation, bullying, or warring*. Healthy play that brings out the best in guys and calls into question those destructive messages is the reason guys *need* to play.

9. Guys need the freedom to BE. Guys grow up having great expectations imposed upon them. They live in the shadow of a looming cultural press that squeezes them into the mold of what a man should be. This encoding often runs counter to the guy's image of himself. Much of this book will reveal the complicated encoding that presses a guy into a dysfunctional conformity of Western cultural masculinity.

Guys often internally question whether they're normal, manly, or if they're in denial of who they really are. Many guys grow up to be men who never know who they are. Therefore, they have difficulty with intimacy. After all, how can a guy give himself to someone else if he is constantly wondering who he really is? He is forced to suppress his feelings, to hide any signs of weakness, and to prove himself by doing things that run counter to his passions (such as being athletic, mechanical, or outdoorsy) or his morals (such as leading other guys to believe he scored with his girlfriend or showing no weaknesses or flaws). In short he becomes defined by what he does.

For a guy, action and behavior define his being. What he does determines who he is, rather than who he is (character, intrinsic qualities, and so on) mandating what he *does*. If you ask a man who he is, he'll say, "I'm—a police officer, a pastor, a teacher, an executive." He tells you what he does. He doesn't say, "I'm—compassionate, trustworthy, discerning, and so on." Boys need to be surrounded with men



who will fight for their freedom to discover who they are *apart* from what they do (or are expected to do). Men need to model character (being) over action (doing). Young guys need to see men who are compassionate, meaning they will be moved to emotion (a code-breaking action that grows out of being) *and* action (doing things that are loving and caring). They need men in their lives who will model the freedom of being.

10. Guys need to be loved. Joe Ehrmann, the former defensive lineman for the Baltimore Colts, is one of the football coaches for the Gillman High School Greyhounds. Before the team goes out on the field, they work themselves into an adrenaline frenzy with a battle cry that exemplifies Ehrmann's strong influence over the masculine development of his guys.

The coach yells, "What's our job as coaches?"

The team roars back, "To love us!"

Ehrmann then prompts them with, "What's *your* job?"

The guys shout, "To love each other!"

Ehrmann, a man who makes teenage guys into men, realizes that guys need to be loved. He understands that the defining point for a man is not his strength, nor his sexual conquests, nor even what he's accomplished, but rather it's his love. The only way a guy can learn to love is to be loved.

Guys need male role models who will step up and love them and also show their love for others. Guys desperately desire to have loving men in their lives who will speak a multilingual love language. Spending time with a guy, showing him affection, verbalizing your love for him, serving him, and giving to him are all necessary parts of really loving him. When men do this with teenage guys, they destroy the cultural restraints that limit teenage guys. They model



TEENAGEGUYS

what it means to be a man who separates a powerful loving relationship from a sexual one.

Often guys learn to confuse love with sex. They grow up with a love deficit and attempt to fulfill their needs for affection with sexual behaviors. Men who demonstrate Christ's love to teenage guys break that sexual connection guys tend to form between being and needing love. It also models that love is a powerful force with which to be reckoned because it comes from a masculine, non-sexual source.

As I mentioned earlier in point number four (Guys need community), I've always contended that it's difficult for men in our culture to be intimate and loving with an invisible God (whom they perceive to be predominantly masculine in nature) when they can't do that in a tangible way man to man. The early stages of the men's movement recognized this love deficit and saw this as being fulfilled by one's father. When a dad couldn't meet this need, it created a deep wound in a teenage guy's heart that he then carried with him throughout his life. It was believed that a guy's father was the only one who could meet this need because men still bought into the notion that love had strong sexual connections. Obviously, the only man who would love a guy without that type of overtone would be his own father. The point they missed is that love doesn't have to—nor should it—only come from a guy's father. Any man who desires to be like Christ and model Jesus to teenage guys will love them deeply.

Jesus said people would know his disciples by their love for each other. Thus, love becomes the defining mark for a Christian. Guys need to be loved as a means of fulfilling their deepest emotions and understanding that they're valuable. But guys also need to be loved because it models what a man should be and do.