



Script for Adolescent Development Audio Clip

Being a parent or caregiver of a child with an intellectual or developmental disability is different in some ways from parenting a child without one. The general wisdom and child-rearing advice don't always translate well to the unique challenges we and our children experience. This can be especially true when our kids with intellectual or developmental disabilities become teenagers and move into the complex stage of puberty. But the physical changes of puberty aren't very different for our children than for their peers without intellectual or developmental disabilities.

For the most part, our kids reach puberty at the same time as other kids. The support we provide during this time in their lives can help our kids feel more confident and secure as they move through puberty and into young adulthood.

We're all probably familiar with the physical changes that come with puberty. What might not always be as clear are the social and emotional changes that our kids also go through. Some young people in this stage start showing a desire for more privacy and independence. Some also experience and express their emotions more strongly. Like most things related to kids, these social and emotional changes will probably be a little unique to each individual.

It's a good idea to start talking to our kids about puberty before it begins, so these changes don't come as a surprise to them. This gives them time to think about the changes and ask any questions they may have. It also gives us the opportunity to reassure them that all of this is normal, healthy, and okay to talk about.

Other changes during puberty are about behavior, so it's important we make sure our kids are clear on what's okay for public spaces and what needs to be done in private. We also play an important role in helping our kids understand the sexual and romantic feelings they start to have and how to appropriately express them. We go a long way to helping our kids through puberty by creating opportunities for them to talk to us about everything from healthy relationships to setting boundaries to the importance of consent.

Puberty can be challenging for young people and for the adults who love them. We can make it more manageable by finding balance between their growing and healthy need for privacy and independence and our desire and responsibility to keep them safe. We're their biggest cheerleaders and their strongest allies. Their health, well-being, and dignity are worth our best effort.