

Discovering the Real Me

Student Textbook #7
Who Will I Be?

For adolescents 12 to 14 years of age

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Chapter 1

Everything's Changing!

Jenny ran out of the house and down the street as fast as she could. What's wrong with me? she thought. Why was it that recently it seemed every conversation with her parents turned into a shouting match? Everything they did irritated her. Their questions, their advice, even seemingly harmless things like, "Dinner's ready!" could set her off.

Now thirteen, Jenny's whole world seemed to be turning upside down. She was becoming a different person, but who? Where was that sweet little daddy's girl of just six months ago, who loved to cuddle up in her father's arms? Now it seemed there was someone else inside of her that wanted to push him and the rest of her family away.

Things were happening too fast. Life was suddenly speeding up, and Jenny felt out of control. Where was it all leading?

While all this was swimming around in her head, her legs had taken her into a nearby park. At first not noticing her surroundings, she gradually calmed down as she walked past elderly people on benches, young parents with small children in the playground area, and a small ice cream stand. Beyond that area, the park became quiet, and she found a secluded spot off the footpath where she could lay on the grass and collect her thoughts.

What a weird time of life being a teenager is, she thought. Life used to be so much simpler. Now everything seemed complicated and confusing. She didn't even like herself anymore. Her neck was too long; her feet were too big; and, worst of all, she was as thin as a rail. While all her classmates were developing nice figures, she was turning into a thin basketball-type player.

As Jenny lay on the grass thinking about her miserable life, she looked up at the trees and the clear blue sky beyond. Her eyes fastened on something hanging from a branch directly above her head. It was brownish-green, and although there was no wind, it was moving. Slowly, she sat up, then got up on her feet and stretched her long neck even longer to get a good look at this mysterious object.

It was about two inches long, and it hung straight down from a branch at the end of a tiny twig. Too thick to be a leaf, Jenny realized at once it was the cocoon of a butterfly, and its occupant was getting ready to emerge. Fascinated, Jenny kept still, not wanting to miss the moment of the butterfly's appearance. The cocoon shook back and forth a few more minutes, then suddenly began to open. Slowly, the butterfly pushed itself out of the cocoon, its damp crumpled wings beginning to show. As it emerged, the wings began to spread, revealing a beautiful blue and yellow pattern. It wasn't long before it was completely out, hanging its gorgeous new wings out to dry. Soon, it would flutter away high into the sky.



There is a lot to be learned by watching nature. After all, we are part of nature too.

In one way or another, every living thing goes through a process of transformation as it gets older. The butterfly's transformation is particularly spectacular. Jenny was lucky enough to catch the moment of its emergence from its cocoon. From this time onward, it would begin its adult life as a free and beautiful creature. However, up until that moment, its life had been pretty dull—crawling and eating constantly as a caterpillar, then wrapping itself in a cocoon for several weeks. But all that served the purpose of preparing for the time when it would be able to take flight.

In the coming years, you too will feel the growing urge to take flight as you approach adulthood. This is natural, as your destiny is to become an independent and responsible adult. At the same time, it is important to wait until the proper time. We cannot hurry the process, just as the caterpillar has to wait until the process of transformation is completed before emerging from its cocoon.

The process of human transformation is called puberty, and it means changing from childhood to adulthood. Sometimes the process is not pretty, just as caterpillars and cocoons are not very pretty. But it is all a necessary process of growing up.

Still, if it's all so natural, why all the emotions, anger, frustration, and impatience? Why is the body so out of control? To explain, we have to get a little technical.

EXTERNAL CHANGES

It starts with your pituitary gland (a pea-shaped gland located at the bottom of your brain) releasing special hormones. Hormones are body chemicals that carry important messages to cells. "Hormone" comes from a word that means "to spur on". Hormones "spur on" chemical changes at the cellular level necessary for growth, development, and energy.

These changes take place at different rates for different people. Some of your friends may still look like young kids, while others look more like adults. Everyone is getting or going to get taller. When this growth spurt happens, it usually lasts for two to three years. At its peak, some kids can grow four inches or more in one year.

With all this quick growth, it can seem like one part of your body—your feet, for instance—are growing faster than everything else. This can make you feel clumsy or awkward. This is normal. The rest of your body will eventually fill out and shape up, and you'll feel less clumsy.

INTERNAL CHANGES

Hormones not only affect the way you look on the outside, but they also create changes on the inside. They influence your emotions and thinking. You might find yourself getting confused or flustered. You might feel overly sensitive or become upset easily. Some kids lose their tempers more often and get angry with their families or friends. And, of course, you may feel anxious about how your changing body looks.

It can be hard to understand all these new emotions. It's important to know that while your body is adjusting to the new hormones, so is your mind. When you get upset at people, try to remember that they usually aren't trying to hurt your feelings on purpose. With these changes happening so fast, even family and close friends may find it difficult to keep up with them.

You might also have new, confusing feelings about sex—and sexual feelings that you’ve never felt before. And you will probably have lots of questions. When you have new adult hormones, it means that you have new adult responsibilities for what you do with your body. That’s why it’s important to take time to understand these changes and what they mean for your life.

VALUES FOR LIFE

People are all a little different from each other, so it makes sense that they don’t all develop in the same way. During puberty, everyone changes at his or her own pace. Maybe some of your friends are getting curves, and you don’t have any yet. Maybe your best friend’s voice has changed, but people still mistake you for your sister on the phone. Or maybe you’re sick of being the tallest girl in your class, or the only boy who has to shave.

In the end, just about everyone catches up eventually, and most differences between you and your friends will even out. What is important are the values that you choose to adopt as guidelines for your life. Values are the things that are important for your life and have to do with what you feel about right and wrong. Your values influence the kind of person you will become.

You may not have much control over your bodily transformation, but you do have control over your internal transformation. Growing up is not just a matter of starting to *look like* an adult, but of learning to *act like* an adult. To do that requires taking responsibility for your actions and behaving in a mature manner. When you can do that, you will be ready to leave your “cocoon” and be as independent as you like.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What is the meaning of the story at the beginning of the chapter?

2. What is puberty?

3. What are hormones?

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4. Do you feel you are already going through these changes, or not yet?

5. In what ways has your body changed in the past year?

6. In what ways has your mind changed?

7. How have your relationships with family and friends changed in the past year?

8. What values are guiding your life?

EXERCISE: “MARKING TIME”

Make a timeline identifying the key milestones in your life. For example, your timeline could include when you first walked and talked, your first day of school, your first soccer game, and other activities up to the present, including any changes you have experienced due to puberty. Try to include at least ten items. Think about why you chose the events that you did. How do you think your timeline might be different from someone else's?

REFLECTION EXERCISE: “MY VALUES”

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being high, please evaluate the importance of the following values to your life. Then rate how much you are practicing these values.

<i>Value</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Practice</i>
Love in the family		
Respect for others		
Responsibility		
Honesty		
Self-control		
Patience		
Fairness		
Trustworthiness		
Taking care of things		
Generosity		
Forgiveness		
Cooperation		