



When Our Children *Really* Think

Don't be surprised if your 13-year-old replaces her play-by-play description of her day with angry outbursts. What is happening is a gradual, almost magical shift in the way your child thinks. Up until the early teens, a child thinks immaturely with little ability to conceptualize. But around age 13, a young person begins to think like an adult.

Jean Piaget, the famous Swiss psychologist, studied the development of thinking in children. He referred to the thinking of elementary and early junior high schoolers as "concrete operations" and named mature thinking "formal operations". Piaget found that mature thinking automatically results from growing up and can neither be hurried nor delayed by either parents or the educational system.

New Ways of Relating

As children try to adjust to "formal operations" type thinking and begin to question their parents' behavior, they often display their new thinking style through anger, outburst and retorts.

For the first time, they can truly judge their own ability to handle difficult situations, and for the first time, their judgement on issues affecting their lives may be better than that of their parents! **This new ability to think is at the heart of many parent/child misunderstandings.**

You may notice some of the following changes in your child as he or she moves into adult-type thinking:

1. Parents no longer hear long and detail-packed stories of movies, school or other activities.
2. For the first time, your child understands the meaning of parables and sayings such as, "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones."
3. Children begin to understand political cartoons on a deeper level rather than just laughing about a character's big nose or humorous appearance.
4. No longer do our children ask questions whose answers seem obvious. No longer do parents hear. "*I don't get it, Mom.*"



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5. Young people begin to question, for the first time, whether or not the end justifies the means.

6. Children no longer automatically buy into their parents' value systems just because they love their parents.

7. Young people begin to both question and comment on their parents' behavior from a more objective perspective.

Let Them Take Flight!

While parents may find some of these changes confusing, and at times disruptive, it helps to understand that they are a natural and important part of a child's development. You can expect this shift toward conceptual adult thinking to take place over a period of about six months.

Parents who have raised responsible children can welcome this change as a major step in their child's development into adulthood. They can also recognize it as a time to backoff, let their children unfold their newly-found cerebral wings and take flight. They'll be equipped to leave the nest when it's time.

Tip of the Day

Make sure there is more control available to your child this year than last year.
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For more information, contact the Family Help Line: 1-800-932-HOPE (in Washington State)

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