

# ADOLESCENCE: A PASSAGE THROUGH TURBULENT WATERS



Your actions don't define you, but you learn from them. – Julien, 16



## A WORD FROM THE DYPS

Adolescence is one of life's milestones, which brings its share of transformations, self-doubt, and soul-searching. It's also a demanding and complex time due to the many changes happening both physically and emotionally. This explains why adolescence is such a hot topic of discussion. Because of its beauty, its eagerness, its passion, its creativity and the many challenges faced by some troubled youth, adolescence is a step in our development that leaves no one indifferent.

Transgression is part of socialization during adolescence.  
45% of teens are involved in common crimes.  
– Desjardins et al, 2008

The passage from adolescence into adulthood is like a turbulent river that flows into the sea.

Rivers may be calm and quiet, or they may be vibrant and agitated—even threatening at times—but each one is unique and influenced by its environment, its tributaries, and the quality of its resources. Similarly, adolescents are different from one another, yet each is invaluable.

We have to care about each of them, take an interest in their present, and look after their future. Despite the turbulence that can arise along their journey, adolescents are constantly evolving and filled with an immense potential for life and development.

Directors of youth protection engage in dealing with the distress of the most vulnerable teens alongside our partners on a daily basis. At times, as a society we may have difficulty forging a positive, respectful, and inclusive relationship with them.

Because adolescents need support from all of us, and because they often lack a strong and determined voice, our 14<sup>th</sup> annual report addresses the notion of collective commitment to take better care of our youth and help them better weather the storm.

Adolescents placed under the care of DYPS in Québec have many faces. They are children that suffered abuse and find it difficult to grow up. They are young persons with mental health issues and drug addiction problems. Some of these teens were victims of exploitation, and their journeys are often shaped by a lack of care, monitoring, affection, stable relationships, and inspiring role models.

Sometimes adolescents are called difficult and instigators, they can be perceived as being emotionally indifferent and having a challenge in building relationships. Adolescents are similar to rivers that appear impressive from afar and as though they can't be crossed for fear of losing one's footing if ventured into. However, shielded behind this close-minded attitude often lies a helpless and distraught teenager in particular need of our goodwill and efforts to build bridges to one another.

Anyone who takes the time to look at their journey realizes how similar these youths are to an endless rapid. Challenges become apparent at a young age, and, when added together, these difficulties can mark them. This is particularly noticeable when they begin school. For some, this step turns into a hurdle that feeds their sense of not being up to the task, of letting others down, and of being an inconvenience. Their self-esteem can become even weaker than it initially was. Then comes high school; a period during which accumulated challenges are felt more strongly, and result in a string of failures that feed a persisting sense of shame, injustice, and anger, and which triggers a loss of meaning and motivation. And that doesn't include the wounds that can at times be left by the family setting, which often adds insult to injury.

The attitudes, actions and words of adults around these children are crucial, as they may be the spark that gets them off the ground. Conversely, they may also feed their sense of incompetence and social exclusion. The adults mandated with inspiring these youngsters have a huge responsibility. Fortunately, their commitment to youth issues is just as strong.

Article 1 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* stipulates that: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." But, for how long? We would like to be able to claim it loud and clear because to think otherwise seems inconceivable.

Unfortunately, we all know that is not the case. A quick look around will confirm this.

Our youth are the near future. One day soon, they will be the ones to shape our world. Like our rivers, our youth will contribute to the quality of our environment. Their place and their voice in this world are in need of urgent attention, as is the need to worry about their well-being, their mental health, and social integration.

As Directors of Youth Protection, this is the message we want to convey: it is crucial that those working with young people reflect upon their perception of them, and that they keep their commitment and reaffirm their willingness to help and protect them. Together, we must have courage and find creative ways in order to navigate through these turbulent waters. We must persevere in our efforts, and support the most vulnerable ones as humanely as possible if we hope to provide the necessary guidance to help them realize their full potential.

To take care of our youth means to invest in our collective future, but most of all it means to sow the seeds of a society where all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Mood swings, impulsiveness, irritability, difficulty concentrating, thrill-seeking, are but a few examples of behaviours teenagers are often criticized for. These can be explained by the fact that during the teenage years, the human brain hasn't quite finished developing and seeks to regulate the growing levels of sexual hormones. – Sonia Lupien, Researcher



“If your childhood was damaged, chances are your teenage years will be too. Adolescence is a string of accumulations from childhood.”

Francis, 17

“Later in life, I want to be able to help those in need, as I was helped in my time of need.”

Magalie, 15

Youth in rehabilitation centres have often experienced multiple traumas:

- Physical abuse (in 60% of teens),
- Psychological abuse (68%),
- Sexual abuse (38%),
- Physical neglect (56%),
- Emotional neglect (58%).

Source: Collin-Vézina, D., Coleman, K, Milne, L, Sell, J.& Daigneault, I. (2011). Trauma Experiences, Maltreatment-Related Impairment, and Resilience Among Child Welfare Youth in Residential Care. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, vol. 9, issue 5.

Abuse suffered during childhood paves the way for social difficulties during adolescence. In some cases, abuse may also lead to homelessness. In this regard, DYPs across Québec want to pursue their best efforts to provide youths who've had a difficult childhood with the best tools so they can be ready to tackle adulthood.

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