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## CHAPTER 1:

# THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL SKILLS IN THE TEEN YEARS

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### **The Challenges and Opportunities of Adolescence**

**D**id you know that your social skills can determine your health, happiness, and even how long you live? In just a few moments, you're going to find out why. So, let's jump in.

#### ***The Hormonal Roller Coaster***

"It's just the hormones." You've probably heard this a lot. Well, it's true. Puberty: This is that part of your life where your body changes and things get real awkward, real quick. What no one ever tells you, though, is how this affects your brain, behavior, and even your sense of self. Let's dive in here for a moment and explore this. What exactly are hormones, and what's the point of this whole hormonal development thing anyway?

Plainly put, this is the phase of your life when you become a fully grown human. You're no longer a child, and your body is maturing. This generally happens between the ages of eight and 14. Although a lot of the changes happen in the body, there's a lot that happens to your brain as well (Breehl & Caban, 2023). Have

you been feeling very anxious, sad, frustrated, or even outright angry lately? It's normal, and unfortunately, this is just a part of the process. It does pass, but it takes a while TBH. I'm going to help you understand these changes and, more importantly, help you harness them and see how they can turn you into your brand-new savage self.

When you wake up one morning and suddenly your voice is breaking, or your body is changing in unexpected ways, you start to question who you are. Your face might get a few pimples, and you definitely won't recognize yourself in the mirror. Suddenly, you're self-conscious, and you start walking around like everyone's judging you. When you're going through this development, you often misread other people's facial expressions. This is because you're developing the skills you need in adult life, but you haven't quite mastered them yet. You also tend to do things without thinking; you might take risks or get into a fight with your best friend and afterward think, *Wow, why was I such a jerk?* Another big thing that happens during this time of maturing is that you want to hang out with your friends more and spend a lot less time with your caregivers. This is perfectly normal, but watch out; your caregivers don't know how to interpret this, so you must try to understand that they're not being difficult on purpose. They're going through this process with you as well (*Social and Emotional Changes*, 2018). The social challenges that come with maturing are very difficult to manage. For one, your moods are all over the place. You could wake up feeling great and by lunchtime be overwhelmed with anxiety.

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*Quick tip: When you start to get overwhelmed, ground yourself. To do this, take a quick breath and find something outside of yourself you can focus on. Make it something small*

*and not important, like a bird or a tree. Just spend a few seconds focusing on that, then go on with life. This will help you regain control and feel more centered.*

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It's important that you find some ways to help manage this journey of maturation. Here are some things to think about and some tips that can help you manage this difficult phase in your life. It's important to remember that everyone will go through phases at a different pace, and everyone's experience is unique. Probably the most important tip I can give is related to health and fitness. Exercise will help balance the hormones that are running wild through your body and brain (*Puberty*, 2021). Take frequent walks, and definitely consider joining a school wrestling team or self-defense classes outside of school.

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*In practice: When it comes to fitness, we all think about the gym. This is a great idea, but it's not your only option. If you're just starting out, walking is great. Push-ups are better, and a balanced home workout is best. Start by finding a basic home fitness program online that works for you. Once you've done it consistently for a few weeks, hit the gym.*

*Bonus tip: Consider getting into combat sports. Look into things like boxing (builds stamina), wrestling (builds confidence and agility), or Krav Maga (for practical self-defense). This will give you a good training regimen and will make you feel confident and less salty about your current goals in life. And, as a bonus, you can get the whole squad in on it and help your friends feel powerful and confident in the process.*

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## ***The Social Challenge***

As you're finding your feet and becoming the new you, you're also entering into a new social space. The way you hang out with your squad, the way you see the opposite sex, and even the things you like and don't like are changing quickly. In this new world, there are a few things you'll want to look out for. The biggest one is peer pressure.

Everyone's looking for a sense of belonging, and everyone's just as confused as you are. So, something weird happens here, and it's actually lit, if you think about it. Everyone wants you to act, think, and behave the way they do. The cool thing about this is that the bonds you form with people around you become long-lasting and very strong. The dark side to this is that the things they're doing are not always the best choice. Drugs, crime, teenage pregnancy, and a whole list of other behaviors are all over the place. Don't get pushed into that group; embrace your unique power and be the best version of yourself. Remember earlier when we said that the choices you make during your teen years are often reckless? This is an example of that. People your age are experimenting with the world around them and making reckless choices. Then they want everyone around them to do the same so they can feel like part of a group and finally understand the world with people who are just like them. This leads to using substances you shouldn't, going to places you shouldn't, and acting in a way that's just not you. This is the ugly side of peer pressure. It's easy to avoid if you remember these basic concepts: You're a unique individual, and just because everyone is doing the lit thing, doesn't mean it'll resonate with you. Focus on yourself during this time and become the best human you can be. The powerful techniques you're learning in this book are going to help you glow up like a boss. Always make the best choice for the future you, and at the same time, build your skills to become the

house in your squad. Realize that the journey you're going through right now will shape the person you become in a few years, so do the things now that'll make you proud of yourself tomorrow. Talk to the girl, say yes to that guy, and join the wrestling team. Do things that'll make you more powerful tomorrow.

You're becoming the next version of yourself, so you want to be independent. You're figuring out who you are and discovering new music, different foods, and new love interests. At the same time, you're put in a position where no one understands you, so you move closer to the people who do. Your friends are going through the same thing, and together, you guys will explore life and figure out what you like and what you don't like. You're looking for yourself and building a new identity (independence), and at the same time, you have this urge to be accepted by your group (social acceptance). These two things are happening at the same time, and this leaves you a little shook. Something to be careful of here is when you see someone acting in a certain way or doing certain things, you're going to want to copy them. Don't worry, you're not posing; it's natural. Just make sure that you're not changing who you really are to please someone else. You are your own powerful person, so don't follow the crowd. Lean into your skills and show the world how bright you can shine.

Now, this social acceptance isn't just around your friends. At home, a similar thing happens. Your caregivers are pushing you in certain directions. You're trying to gain independence, and then the friction starts. You feel like your caregivers are forcing you to be something you're not, they feel like you're ignoring them and don't care about their feelings, and the whole situation becomes very difficult. The fact is that they know what's coming your way in the next 60 years, and they're trying to prepare you for this. You need to find a balance here; look at what made them

awesome and pick up a few tricks to build your own social playbook. But you also need to focus on your individual development.

It's time to touch on a touchy topic: social media. I'm sure you constantly hear things like, "Put that phone away" or "All that social media will rot your brain." Don't roll your eyes, though; previous generations didn't grow up with the tech we have today. It was literally a different world for your caregivers when they were kids. What we have here is a misunderstanding. The fact is that if you spend too much time on your socials, it's going to have a negative effect on your life. At the same time, you can't just detox and skip out on it either. So, what now?

Well, it's about balance. We live in a society where social media is probably the largest part of entertainment, news, and general events. But there's a darker side. My favorite quote is, "Comparison is the thief of joy," by Theodore Roosevelt. When you see people on IG or TikTok living perfect lives with perfect bodies, you compare them to yourself. This is simply not true. A lot of social media is fake or altered. So, if you go through life thinking this is what you should be, you'll constantly think you're not perfect. Don't fall for this trap.

### ***The Opportunities***

During this time, you're leveling up. The skills you develop on this journey are going to build long-lasting relationships. You're figuring yourself out, but you're also building your squad. This is the advantage of learning proper social skills early in life. The way you act and interact with the people around you will always be your greatest superpower. As you move through this book, you're going to learn key skills to help you find your way around the social arena. Trust me, learning this stuff now will give you a

huge advantage in your life going forward, like when you get your first job or start college. No matter what your future holds, you're going to be dealing with fellow humans. The skills you learn here are going to fast-track your social life. In the long run, you'll build better relationships, have a better chance at love, and have more control over your life.

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*In reality: Cassandra had just turned 13, had a standard upbringing, and was enrolled in public school. Nothing special, she thought. One morning, she woke up and started feeling differently. She had entered her hormonal growth cycle, and her caregivers had the standard talk with her. But nothing was standard about her situation. The biggest issue was her skin; she had a serious outbreak all over her face. Every day at school was a rollercoaster of emotions. Her friends started drifting away from her, and soon, she found herself alone almost every day. After a few weeks, she took to watching dancing videos on YouTube and instantly fell in love. Her caregivers arranged for her to attend classes twice a week. This was the break she needed. In this class she met three other students, all dealing with the same issues. But they couldn't just sit and mope; they had to engage, and they all liked dancing. Fast forward 10 years down the line: Cassandra is now a professional dancer and is still in touch with the three friends she met at dance class.*

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So, there you have it. Yes, there are a lot of challenges that come with maturing, but there are also so many opportunities. Always look for the win, the positive. Next, we'll look at stereotypes and labels. Are you a jock, a nerd, or does this even matter?